

A narrative inquiry into comics journalism: a reflection on

***Šoba* by Joe Sacco**

Nicolene Humarita Louw

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister
in Fine Arts in the Department of Fine Arts, University of Stellenbosch.

Supervisor: Anton Kannemeyer

April 2006



Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date:.....24/02/2006.....

Abstract

A narrative inquiry into comics journalism: a reflection on *Šoba* by Joe Sacco

N.H. Louw

Magister in Fine Arts minithesis, University of Stellenbosch

This study reflects on an example of comics journalism namely *Šoba*, by comic artist and journalist Joe Sacco. The aim of the study is to draw attention to the potential of comics journalism as a rich narrative art form, that can contribute greatly to present day understandings of news and constructions of reality in a poststructuralist context.

Šoba is studied firstly as an example of a narrative and secondly as an example of comics journalism. Consequently, *Šoba* is contextualised firstly in terms of narrative studies and secondly in terms of comics journalism. After contextualising *Šoba* in terms of these fields, it is discussed in detail by using concepts taken from narratives studies, comics and journalism. I argue that poststructuralism effected the changes in comics and journalism that resulted in the merge between the two as comics journalism and as exemplified in *Šoba*. The study furthermore explores how concepts traditionally associated with journalism, such as truth, history and objectivity, are applied and subverted in comics journalism.

Keywords

narratives, structuralism, narratology, poststructuralism, narrative studies, journalism, comics, comics journalism, Joe Sacco, *Šoba*

April 2006

Opsomming

'n Narratiewe ondersoek in strip joernalistiek: 'n indringende blik op Šoba deur Joe Sacco.

N.H. Louw

Magister in Beeldende Kuns tesis, Universiteit van Stellenbosch.

Hierdie studie beoog om lig te werp op die potensiaal van strip joernalistiek as 'n ryk narratiewe kunsvorm wat kan bydrae tot die hedendaagse verstaan van nuus en konstruksies van realiteit in 'n poststrukturealistiese konteks .

In hierdie studie word Šoba eerstens beskou as 'n voorbeeld van narratief en tweedens as strip joernalistiek. Nadat Šoba as narratief en strip joernalistiek gekontekstualiseer is, word dit noukeurig bespreek aan die hand van konsepte wat afkomstig is uit die velde van narratiewe studies, strip kuns en joernalistiek . Ek argumenteer dat poststrukturealisme veranderinge in beide stripkuns en joernalistiek te weeg gebring het wat die samesmelting van dié twee dissiplines moontlik gemaak het. Šoba kan beskou word as 'n voorbeeld van hierdie samesmelting. Verder poog die studie aan te dui dat konsepte soos waarheid, geskiedenis en objektiwiteit wat tradisioneel met joernalistiek geassosieer word, tergelyk gehandhaaf en ondermyn word in strip joernalistiek.

Sleutelwoorde

narratief, strukturealisme, narratologie, poststrukturealisme, narratiewe studies, joernalistiek, strippe, strip joernalistiek, Joe Sacco, Šoba

April 2006

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my friends Daniël du Plessis and Leonora van Staden, my study leader Anton Kannemeyer and especially my family for their support during my studies.

This study is dedicated to
Faure and Huma Louw.

Contents

List of illustrations	viii
List of terms	ix
1. Chapter one: Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Introducing Joe Sacco	2
1.3 Aims of study	2
1.4 Methodology	3
1.5 Theoretical framework	4
1.6 Overview of chapters	5
2. Chapter two: Narrative, structuralism and poststructuralism: a historical and philosophical background	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Structuralism and poststructuralism	8
2.2.1 The relationship between structuralism and poststructuralism	8
2.2.2 Structuralism	9
2.2.3 Poststructuralism	10
2.3 Structuralism and the science of narratology	12
2.4 Poststructuralism and narrative studies	15
2.4.1 A new view of narrative	15
2.4.1.1 Narrative and history	15
2.4.1.2 Narrative personality and identity	16
2.4.1.3 Narrative and power	17
2.4.2 A new view of narratology	18
2.5 Conclusion	20
3. Chapter three: Joe Sacco in context: comics, journalism and comics journalism	22
3.1 Introduction	22
3.2 Textual journalism	23
3.2.1 Journalism, modernism and structuralism	23
3.2.2 Journalism, postmodernism and poststructuralism	24
3.3 Visual journalism	26
3.3.1 The nineteenth century illustrated journals	26
3.3.2 Photojournalism	27
3.3.3 War Art	29
3. 4 Comics	30
3.4.1 Introduction	31
3.4.2 Early comics	31
3.4.3 Adventure comics and superheroes	33
3.4.4 Comics after World War Two	33
3.4.5 Underground comics in the 60s	34
3.4.6 Comics during the 70s and 80s	35
3.4.7 "Alternative" comics	36
3.5 Poststructuralism and comics	37
3.5.1 Underground comics	37
3.5.2 Alternative comics	38
3.6 Conclusion	40
3.7 Illustrations: addendum to chapter three	42
4. Chapter four: A reflection on Šoba	45
4.1 Introduction	45

4.2 A historical background to the war in Bosnia between 1992-1995.....	45
4.3 Self reflexivity in <i>Šoba</i>	46
4.4 Subjectivity.....	47
4.5 History and truth.....	49
4.6. Style.....	50
4.7 Characterisation.....	52
4.8 Text.....	54
4.9 Fragmentation of the narrative.....	55
4.10 <i>Šoba</i> , the reader and the creation of meaning.....	56
4.10.1 Moment to moment transitions in <i>Šoba</i>	57
4.10.2 Scene to scene transitions.....	57
4.11 The limitations and potential of comics journalism.....	58
4.12 Conclusion.....	60
4.13 Illustrations: addendum to chapter four.....	62
5. Chapter five: Conclusion.....	67
5.1 Introduction.....	67
5.2 Summary of the study.....	67
5.3 Contributions and limitations of the study.....	68
5.4 Concluding remarks.....	70
6. Bibliography.....	72
7. Appendix.....	84

List of illustrations

Figure 3.1: Types Roumains (Lebeck 2001:36).....	42
Figure 3.2: Her Majesty's inspection of the wounded troops at Chatham (Lebeck 2001:28).....	42
Figure 3.3: Spanish Village (Lebeck 2001:256).....	43
Figure 3.4: Execution of communist policemen by Hungarian rebels (Lebeck 2001:253).....	43
Figure 3.5: Saving the guns at Colenso (Greenwall 1992:25).....	44
Figure 3.6: <i>The Scout</i> (Greenwall 1992:18).....	44
Figure 4.1: <i>Palestine</i> (Sacco 2003:131)	62
Figure 4.2: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:12).....	62
Figure 4.3: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:3).....	62
Figure 4.4: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:27).....	62
Figure 4.5: <i>Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95</i> (Sacco 2003:67).....	62
Figure 4.6: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:38).....	63
Figure 4.7: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:27).....	63
Figure 4.8: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:21).....	63
Figure 4.9: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:29).....	63
Figure 4.10: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:9).....	64
Figure 4.11: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:17).....	64
Figure 4.12: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:26).....	64
Figure 4.13: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:20).....	64
Figure 4.14: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:23).....	65
Figure 4.15: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:10).....	65
Figure 4.16: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:3).....	65
Figure 4.17: <i>Šoba</i> (Sacco 1998:3).....	65
Figure 4.18: A furshlugginer genius! (Spiegelman 1993:21)	66
Figure 4.19: A furshlugginer genius! (Spiegelman 1993:22)	66
Figure 4.20: A furshlugginer genius! (Spiegelman 1993:23)	66

List of terms

Alternative comics: A genre of comics that developed parallel to mainstream comics during the 1980s and 1990s and that is still a genre today. Alternative comics is diverse in subject matter, style and approach and is influenced by the underground comics of the 1960s (Sabin 1996: 177-178; Wepman 1990:43; Sabin & Triggs 2003:13).

Analysis (of a text): Engaging with a text in an impersonal way, structuring and organising data without interpreting it (Saven-Baden 2004:365).

Cartoon/ cartooning/ cartooniness: An iconic way of visually representing subject matter. Images are simplified and drawn iconically in order to amplify certain aspects of the image (McCloud 1993:29-31).

Characterisation: The illusion of a real person in art or literature that is created by traits that are alluded to through action, speech, external appearance as well as the environment that a character finds himself or herself in (Rimmon-Keenan 1983:61-66). It is "the way that a writer makes characters in a book or play [or comic] seem real" (*Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary*...2004. Sv. 'characterization').

Comics: "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 1993:9) Comics is "[p]lural in form [but] used with a singular verb". 'Other images' refer to letters and words that can be perceived to function as images in a comic, as well as symbols such as speed lines and panel borders. Some scholars prefer to refer to comics as sequential art, graphic storytelling or strip art, in order to sidestep the connotation with comical and humorous content.

Comics journalism: The discipline of producing non fiction comics that is researched and "investigate[d] in the field, in real world locales" (Documentary studies...[sa]).

Deconstruction: A critical method of engaging with a text that aims to expose how ideas and concepts "dismantle themselves" (Palmer 1997:139). It aims to demonstrate the instability of meaning and the lack of essences within concepts or ideas (Harland 1987:135).

Discourse: “[A] set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements...that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light” (Burr 1998:48).

Documentary comics: Non fiction comics that isn’t investigated in “real world locales” (Documentary studies...[sa]). This will include historical, biographical and autobiographical comics.

Focalisation: “A viewpoint through which things are seen, felt, understood and assessed” (Genette in Toolan 1998:68) for example in a novel or comic. This term has often been substituted with “point of view”, “perspective” (Bal 1997:142) or “orientation” (Toolan 1988:72).

Formalism: A type of criticism that neglects “the thematic content of a work in order to concentrate on its playful, parodic, or disruptive relation to literary forms, codes and conventions” (Culler 1994:20). It assumes that “[t]exts possess meaning in and of themselves” (New Criticism/Formalism: 2005).

Graphic novel: “[L]engthy comics in a book form with thematic unity” (Sabin 1996:165). Examples are the *Tintin* series *A contract with God* (1978) by Will Eisner (Sabin 1996:165), *A Dark Knight Returns* (1987) by Frank Miller and *Watchmen* (1986) by Dave Moore and Alan Gibbons.

Investigative journalism: See muckraking

Journalism: “Journalism is a discipline of collecting, verifying, reporting and analysing information gathered regarding current events, including trends, issues and people. Those who practice journalism are known as journalists” (Journalism [sa]).

Knowledge: “The particular construction or version of a phenomenon that has received the stamp of “truth” in our society” (Burr 1998:64).

Literary journalism: “[A] genre of literature, also known as [creative non fiction and] narrative journalism, which uses literary skills in the writing of non fiction” (Literary journalism [sa]).

Metanarrative: A term coined by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (Sim 1999:1); also referred to as a grand theory or grand narrative. It is an all embracing concept that attempts to explain all the forces governing the social world and claims to be a universal truth, for example Marxism (Burr 1998:13).

Modernism: Modernism is the intellectual orientation that resulted from and represents the essence of The Enlightenment project. The Enlightenment project started around the mid eighteenth century and aimed to liberate humanity from economic, political and moral oppression imposed by the Church during the medieval period. Modernism assumed that reality could be known through the practice of science, that universal truths existed and that indefinite economic and cultural advancement was a positive pursuit (Burr 1998:12, Sim 1999:vii).

Muckraking: A type of journalism that is non neutral. "Muckraking stories are...compilations of documented fact that lead to an indictment – of individuals or institutions." It is concerned with "detailed factual exposure" (Miraldi 1990:18). The term investigative reporter has largely been replaced with muckraker (Miraldi 1990:6).

Narrative: "[N]arrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other" (Prince 1982:4).

Narrative inquiry: Almost any kind of study that "takes as its object of investigation the story itself" or that uses the "story metaphor" to "create order [and] construct texts in particular contexts" (Riessman 1993:1).

Narratology: Narratology is "the theory and systematic study of narrative" that originated within the structuralist analysis of literary narratives. With the rise of poststructuralism, narratology has grown to include narratives from all fields: films, newspaper journalism, comics, anecdotes and many others (Currie 1998:1).

Narrator: The narrator is the person or "vantage point" we assume to be the originator of the words that tell a story (Toolan 1998:77).

New Journalism: A type of literary journalism that originated in the 1960s. New Journalism blurs the line between fact and fiction by introducing narrative and personal approaches in journalism (Kaul 1997:xv,xvi).

Non fiction: “[B]ooks, articles, [art] or texts about real facts, people and events” (*Oxford’s Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*...2004. Sv. ‘non fiction’).

Photojournalism: “[A] descriptive term for reporting visual information via various media” (Newton 2001:5) or “the work of giving news using mainly photographs” (*Oxford’s Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*...2004. Sv. ‘photojournalism’).

Postmodernism: Postmodernism is a cultural, philosophical and intellectual approach that revolves mainly around the questioning of modernism’s rudimentary assumptions. It is intrinsically doubtful and sceptical about modernist constructions, such as scientific knowledge, social norms, metanarratives and authority (Sim 1999:ix, 3-4 Burr 1998:12-14, Richardson 1994:517-518).

Poststructuralism: An approach to knowledge that developed within postmodernism. It involves the rejection of “cultural certainties that structuralism had been felt to embody; certainties such as the belief that the world was intrinsically knowable...” (Sim 1999:4). It also involves the extension, re-evaluation and reinterpretation of particular structuralist ideas (Cullum-Swan, B & Manning 1994:467).

Power: “Power can be thought of as the extent of a person’s access to sought-after resources, such as money, leisure time, rewarding jobs, and as the extent to which they have the capacity to have some effect on their world, for example by belonging to important decision making bodies such as the cabinet, the judiciary or the board of directors of a big company, and therefore, to have some impact on other people’s lives (Burr 1998:62).”

Realism: Refers to visual art or literature that provides a “convincing illusion of life” through believable characters and settings (Peck and Coyle 1993:120).

Reflection: A personal stance in relation to a text that is being studied that entails interpretation rather than problem solving. This is in contrast to the analysis of a text (Saven-Baden 2004:365-367).

Self reflexivity: When a writer or an artist “draws attention to the fact that he or she is writing a novel [or creating an artwork].” It also comments on the complexity and futility of trying to represent human experience (Peck and Coyle 1993:121).

Silent comic: A comic that consists only of images and no words.

Social Construction: An approach to reality and knowledge within poststructuralism that claims that “phenomena are socially constructed” (What is Social Construction?... [sa]). It emphasises the role of language, relationships and narratives in the construction of realities and meaning (Burr 1998:3-5).

Story: Used interchangeably with ‘narrative’ in a nuanced manner.

Semiotics (or semiology): “...is for a structuralist the science of signs, but for a postmodernist merely the study of them” (Sim 1999:356). Semiotics is based on the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure who claimed that a signifier (word) and signified (concept) together forms a sign that produces meaning (Sim 1999:356).

Sign: Within structuralism, signs are seen as the building blocks of language which can be subdivided into the signifier (word) and the signified (concept). The link between the signifier and signified is erratic. However, it is governed by social convention and does not easily change (Pettit 1975:5-6).

Structuralism: An approach to knowledge associated with Modernism. It assumes “that the world [is] intrinsically knowable” (Sim 1999:4) and claims that knowledge, the world and knowledge of the world consists of unchanging internal structures with specific grammars that provide handles for understanding (Cullum-Swan, B & Manning 1994:467, Sim 1999:4).

Style: “The features of a book/painting, building [comic] etc. that make it typical of a particular author, artist, historical period etc” (*Oxford’s Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*...2004. Sv. ‘style’). In a comic, style can include characterisation, use of colour, conceptual approach and many others.

Stylise: Used to refer to a work of art that is “drawn [or] written in a way that is not realistic” (*Oxford’s Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*...2004. Sv. ‘stylize’).

Subjective: Used to refer to the work of a writer or artist who allows him or herself as person to be included in the process of reflecting on the object. This could include personal thoughts and feelings.

Text: "A text, in poststructuralist terms, is not an object or thing, but an occasion for the interplay of multiple codes and perspectives" (Cullum-Swan, B & Manning 1994:463).

Underground comics: Comics that surfaced in the late 1960's in reaction against the comics code and establishment in general. The subject matter included sex, drugs, rock music and politics and was intended for an adult readership. To a large extent the underground comics were also a mouthpiece for the hippie generation and demonstrated an awakening of political awareness amongst the youth (Sabin 1993:36-37; Sabin 1996:92).

Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Background

“Story is at the heart of the way humans see themselves [and] experience themselves within the contexts of their worlds” (Scheub 1998:21).

My interest in the field of narrative and story¹ originates from my own experience as a comic artist, illustrator and my interest in comics journalism. These factors led me to explore my attraction to stories and the visual narrative in depth. I came to realise that the role of narrative extends beyond its application in comics and visual arts. One of these extended applications is the important role that narratives play in people's construction of social realities and worldviews (Burr 1998; Gergen 2001). This view is often encountered in postmodernism and postructuralism, and challenged me to reassess the role of narratives in comics journalism.

The role that narratives play in our lives is reflected in our understanding of history, of ourselves, and the ways in which we create meaning. A postmodern approach to knowledge and meaning honours the role of narrative in everyday life. Examples can be seen in the ways in which narrative versions of people's personal experiences are encouraged and valued as part of a healing process (Burger 2003a:3), how narratives of previously neglected groups are surfacing in popular culture (Niewoudt 2003:12) and how the telling of personal narratives is fostered to create understanding among people (Burger 2003b:4).

In this study, I will focus on the role of narrative in comics journalism, specifically referring to a short story called *Šoba* by Joe Sacco. My choice of *Šoba* is influenced by my personal interest in comics journalism – as well as the profound impression *Šoba* had on me. *Šoba* is a forty one page comic dealing with aspects of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war. Joe Sacco, a journalist and comic artist, interviewed Šoba, the main

¹ Some researchers, especially of a linguistic orientation, make a distinction between story (or 'fabula') and narrative (Bal in Toolan 2001:10). Rimmon-Kenan (1983:3) defines story as the “narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events.” If this definition and that of Prince (see list of terms) are juxtaposed one can say that a narrative is the representation - the physical manifestation in text or any medium - of story. Story is a chronological mental construct of the happenings – the raw experience of having been involved in a sequence of events. For my purposes the distinction between story and narrative would not be useful and might cause unnecessary technical complications. I will work with the definition of Prince to mean both narrative and story and will use the terms interchangeably and in a nuanced manner.

character of the story about his experiences during the war. The work is perceived as non-fiction.

1.2 Introducing Joe Sacco

Joe Sacco was born in Malta and presently works as a journalist and comic artist in Oregon (Joe Sacco...[sa]). Although drawing comics has always been part of his life, he didn't consider it as a career until a fairly lately in his life. In 1981 he obtained a Bachelors of Arts degree in journalism at the university in Oregon and yet, despite the fact that he is an accomplished comic artist, never received any formal art training (Nevins 2002:1).

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Sacco led a varied existence. He founded the short lived monthly comics newspaper *The Portland Permanent Press*, served as news editor for the *Comics Journal*, travelled widely and compiled and published six editions of his own comic, *Yahoo!*, through Fantagraphics (Nevins 2002:1; Joe Sacco...[sa]; Campbell 2003; Groth 2001).

At the end of 1991, Sacco travelled to Israel and spent two months in the occupied territories, specifically the Gaza strip (Joe Sacco...[sa]; Campbell 2003). This decision was motivated by his growing discomfort with the one sided American reporting of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. His visit to Israel resulted in his widely acclaimed comics series *Palestine*, published in eight editions (Joe Sacco...[sa]).

After *Palestine*, Sacco travelled to the war torn country of Bosnia and produced two stories about his experiences, *Šoba* and *Christmas with Karadzic*. He subsequently completed *Safe Area Gorazde*, a 240 page comic book. (Nevins 2002:1; Joe Sacco...[sa]). In my reflection on *Šoba* in chapter four I will provide a historical background to the 1992-1995 Bosnian war to contextualise the story.

1.3 Aims of study

The aim of my study is to draw attention to the potential of comics journalism as a rich narrative art form in a poststructuralist paradigm. I will do so by referring primarily to the work of Joe Sacco and specifically to *Šoba*. I want to show that comics journalism is an underestimated and underutilised medium that has the potential to contribute greatly to our present understanding of news events, history and our social constructions of reality.

1.4 Methodology

In this study, I approach *Šoba* firstly as an example of a narrative and secondly as an example of comics journalism.² Hence, I will organise the study accordingly. I will focus on *Šoba* from the broad vantage point of narrative studies and subsequently narrow my view to concentrate on the contexts of the narrative art forms that shape *Šoba*. These narrative art forms namely, comics, journalism and comics journalism are bound to specific contexts. After contextualising these art forms, I will reflect on *Šoba* in my last chapter by using concepts such as self reflexivity, subjectivity and characterisation discussed in chapter two and three. I will also introduce and discuss the concept of style.

Narrative inquiry, similar to narrative analysis (Riessman 1993) or narrative studies (Josselson & Lieblich 1995) is the method I will apply in this study. Under the umbrella of social construction

narrative inquiry refers to a variety of research practices, ranging from those that tell a story of how individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes, to those that explore certain methodological aspects of storytelling (Alvermann [sa]).

In short, narrative inquiry means almost any kind of study that “takes as its object of investigation the story itself” or that uses the “story metaphor” to “create order [and] construct texts in particular contexts” (Riessman 1993:1).

I regard my study to be a narrative inquiry since the focus of my exploration is narratives, as applied in journalism, comics and comics journalism. Furthermore my method of inquiry is interdisciplinary – by combining aspects of different disciplines I will include the academic narratives of those fields. I will construct my own academic narrative about *Šoba* and acknowledge this and take responsibility for it by writing in the first person. Writing in the first person is typical of postmodern writing, as Richardson (1994:520), states

Postmodernism claims that writing is always partial, local and situational and that our Self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it – but only partially present, for in our writing we suppress parts of ourselves too.

² It is a personal preference to view *Šoba* firstly as a narrative and secondly as an example of comics journalism. I will therefore move from the broad field of narrative studies and subsequently narrow my view to focus on comics journalism. It is possible to argue that *Šoba* is firstly an example of comics journalism and secondly a narrative, to consider comics journalism as a field that contains narrative studies.

I prefer to use the word reflection as an alternative to the word analysis when I discuss Šoba. The term analysis evokes modernist, reductionistic, quantitative and objective methods of research and of a researcher situated outside the process and text. Reflection or reflexivity implies a personal stance in relation to the text and requires interpretation rather than problem solving (Saven-Baden 2004:365-367). Furthermore, through my use of language, I attempt to reflect the fluid character of poststructuralism. I do so by using descriptive terms that are less final and definitive, for example using 'explore' instead of 'examine.'

1.5 Theoretical framework

My theoretical approach is founded on poststructuralism and considers the role of social construction. There are widespread differences of opinion on how social construction should be described. Some describe it is a movement, others as a theory and it is sometimes referred to as a theoretical orientation or approach (Stam [sa]). Social construction developed and was influenced by other "intellectual movements such as ethnomethodology, social studies of science, feminism, poststructuralism, narrative philosophy, psychology and more" (Stam [sa]). Gergen (1985:226) explains that social construction is a way by "which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common forms of understanding."

Social construction contends that truth and knowledge do not exist outside of people's social constructions of them (What is Social Construction? [sa]). According to Dixon (1995:4) "constructionist views therefore challenge the modernist view of knowledge as an accurate picture of the world." Despite the absence of a clear description, there are some suppositions which can be identified. The following is a summary and interpretation of Vivian Burr's³ (1998:3-5) description.

Social construction places emphasis on the importance of language in the social construction of reality. It is through language, which is a social process, that experience is articulated and meaning created. This constructed meaning of experience constitutes man's knowledge and understanding of his world. Furthermore, this knowledge is channelled into narratives and these narratives represent understanding of the world.

³ Vivian Burr is a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Huddersfield, and author of the book *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (1998).

This understanding, developed by a particular social group at a specific time and place, is not universal, rather it is situationally valid. Social construction then challenges the validity of metanarratives⁴ or universal truths and is more concerned with local narratives and knowledges. In this way social construction places emphasis on the role of language, relationships and narratives in the construction of our realities in a postmodern world.

Social construction maintains that the conventions of communication at a specific time are what determine people's understanding of reality. Reality as a construct emerges between people engaged in social interaction through language. Hence, the reality is their consensual meaning.

1.6 Overview of chapters

In chapter two I will explain the viewpoint that narratives shape our realities and world views. To put this view in context I will discuss the historical and philosophical background of narrative. I aim to explore how perceptions and studies of narratives have changed with the shift from a modernist to a postmodernist position and the related shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. In this chapter I discuss the relevance of narrative studies in general, and its relevance to my reflection on *Šoba* in particular.

In chapter three I will focus on the different narrative art forms that shape *Šoba*, namely comics, journalism and comics journalism. I will explore the history of comics and journalism respectively, and discuss their fusion as comics journalism. My argument will be that poststructuralist thinking influenced both comics and journalism in a way that enabled the two art forms to blend into a harmonious whole. This merge is illustrated by *Šoba* and will be discussed in chapter four.

In chapter four I will reflect on *Šoba* in greater detail. I will use some of the concepts discussed in chapter two and three such as self reflexivity and subjectivity, introduce the concept of style, and discuss *Šoba* in terms of these concepts. These concepts originate from different disciplines and often overlap in the discussion of *Šoba*. The concepts are drawn from the fields of narrative studies, comics and journalism. I hope to show that *Šoba* displays a variety of poststructuralist characteristics and that comics journalism is potentially a powerful and appropriate form of journalism. I will conclude

⁴ See list of terms.

by addressing some of the limitations of comics journalism and speculating about its possible applications.

Chapter two: Narrative, structuralism and poststructuralism: a historical and philosophical background

2.1 Introduction

Šoba can be perceived as simultaneously being an example of a narrative and of comics journalism. In this study I take the position that in the first place *Šoba* is an example of a narrative rather than an example of comics journalism. Therefore, to be able to position *Šoba* in the context of poststructuralist narrative studies, I provide a background to the nature of narratives, how they are studied and how perceptions about narratives have changed. I intend to describe how narratives are instrumental in constructing our social realities and influencing our worldviews and that worldviews determine how we look at narratives. Furthermore I want to outline the importance of narrative studies in a poststructuralist society. By extension, this will create an understanding of why an in depth look at *Šoba* is relevant. In this study I will be referring to narratives as the “representation of at least two real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other” (Prince 1982:4).

In recent years, across various disciplines, interest in narrative has increased (Josselson 1995:31; Clandinin & Connelly 2000:18). This increased interest can be ascribed to philosophical and intellectual changes that have occurred in a paradigm shift from modernism¹ to postmodernism² which includes the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism (Richardson 1994:517-518). In this chapter, I will firstly look at the relationship between structuralism and poststructuralism regarding narrative studies and then continue to explain the arguments and assumptions of structuralism and poststructuralism.

1 Modernism is the intellectual orientation that resulted from and represents the essence of The Enlightenment project. The Enlightenment project started around the mid eighteenth century and aimed to liberate humanity from economic, political and moral oppression imposed by the Church during the medieval period. Applying rational thinking, it searched for truth and the nature of things by pursuing scientific and objective knowledge. Modernism assumed that reality could be known through the practice of science, that universal truths (see metanarratives) existed and that indefinite economic and cultural advancement was a positive pursuit. It also supported the idea that underlying structures governed reality, and once uncovered, would expose the true nature of reality (Burr 1998:12, Sim 1999:vii).

2 See list of terms. Postmodernism is not a complete rejection of modernism but in many ways a re-evaluation and reinterpretation of modernism, a subject of great debate. Postmodernism is not a chronological period, rather a broad approach. Yet, it is an approach that became more influential since the 1960s (Sim 1999:ix,3,4 Burr 1998:12-14, Richardson 1994:517-518), and therefore chronologically placed after modernism.

Secondly, I describe how narratives are studied in a structuralist paradigm, showing that narratives are primarily viewed as literary phenomena and are studied in a scientific manner.³ Thirdly, I explore narrative studies within poststructuralism. I show that perceptions of narratives broadened and that narratives are perceived as being ubiquitous. I explain that poststructuralism changed views on history identity and power. I regard these three areas to be the most important in illustrating how insights about narratives changed. Lastly, I look at the difficulties regarding contemporary narrative studies in a poststructuralist context.

2.2 Structuralism and poststructuralism

Structuralism and poststructuralism are dissimilar but related philosophical positions. Although poststructuralism is very different from structuralism, its origins lie in structuralism.

2.2.1 The relationship between structuralism and poststructuralism

Structuralism and poststructuralism form a complex partnership. Scholars in most academic fields disagree as to what constitutes the differences between them (Culler 1994:24). Culler (1994:25) states that some critics cite Roland Barthes⁴ as an uncompromising structuralist, while others, manipulating terms slightly, imply that the only true structuralists are Tzvetan Todorov⁵ and Claude Lévi-Strauss⁶.

These ambiguities problematise discussion around the two approaches. As I apply structuralism and poststructuralism to narrative studies I will work from the assumption that poststructuralism is in some ways a reaction against structuralism and in other ways an advancement of structuralism (Sarup 1998:4; Smyth 1991:10). Where I draw

3 Science (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*...2004. Sv. 'science') is "[k]nowledge about the structure and behaviour of the natural and physical world, based on facts that you can prove, for example, by experiments." When saying that narratives are studied in a scientific manner, I mean they are approached as a scientist would approach a natural phenomenon. Narrative then, is regarded as a phenomenon that can be completely understood through systematic study and analysis.

4 Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was a cultural critic that took a particular interest in popular culture. He is famous for applying semiology (semiotics) to popular culture in his books such as *Mythologies* and the *Fashion System* and for trying to expose underlying structures in cultural systems (Sim 1999:191-192).

5 Tzvetan Todorov (1939) was a Bulgarian narratologist and formalist critic. Todorov, through studying poetic language, tried to arrive at a description of a grammar of literature (Clark 2001:401)

6 Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908) was a Belgian structural anthropologist who believed that binary opposition (that which Derrida tried to deconstruct) "is a fundamental property of the mind" (Juschka & Dobson 2001:216) and therefore inescapable. He believed that linguistic structures lay beneath culture, and therefore that linguistic structures could explain most things. Some of his critics accused him of being logocentric and of ignoring history (Juschka & Dobson 2001:217).

the dividing line between the two might differ from where another scholar draws the line.

The relationship between structuralism and poststructuralism can be compared to a strained relationship between two colleagues in a meeting, both competing for the boss's attention. A is overly confident and trying to dominate the discussion by making bold suggestions, while B assumes a sceptic stance. He is constantly criticizing A and trying to prove his line of argument faulty. Yet, B would not have any clear alternatives, except improvements on A's suggestions or open ended statements like: "All I am saying is that is not as easy as you make it sound." Yet, they do work for the same company and share some common goals.

Similarly, poststructuralist rhetoric is dependent on structuralist discourse for its existence. Poststructuralism would not have anything to deconstruct if structuralism did not suggest certain constructions of knowledge in the first place. Harland (1987:2) echoes this when saying that "[e]ven when Derrida refutes Lévi-Strauss or Baudrillard declares war on Foucault, the hostilities are still conducted over a common ground."

Although their practices might radically differ at times they both offer critiques on similar subjects. Sarup (1998:1-4) states that both structuralism and poststructuralism put on the market a "*critique of the human subject*", a "*critique of historicism*" a "*critique of meaning*" and a "*critique of philosophy*." To continue to explore these differences and similarities further and how they relate to the study of narratives, it is necessary to consider the two approaches separately.

2.2.2 Structuralism

Structuralism is an approach to knowledge that is often associated with modernist thinking. It is based on the linguistic model developed by the Ferdinand de Saussure (Cullum-Swan, B & Manning 1994:467, Sim 1999:4, Culler 1994:22, Sarup 1998:4). It also places great emphasis on the value of scientific knowledge (Appignanesi & Garrat 1999:48-5). Structuralism furthermore assumes "that the world [is] intrinsically knowable" by knowing the internal structure of language (Sim 1999:4). Knowledge, the world and knowledge of the world is constituted of unchanging internal structures with specific grammars that provide access for understanding. These structures are responsible for the meaning that is discovered in a text (Culler 1994:22).

For de Saussure, language is a system with an "internal grammar" that determines how

the different parts of the language function (Sim 1999:357). Furthermore, he considers language to consist of signs. Signs are the building blocks of language that can be further subdivided into the signifier (word) and the signified (concept). "The union between the signifier and signified takes place in the individual's mind, and its end product is a recognition of the meaning of the word in question" (Sim 1999:357). The link between the signifier and signified is erratic. However, it is governed by social convention and cannot easily change (Pettit 1975:5-6). Therefore, language is "relatively [stable]" and meaning fairly predictable (Sim 1999:4). The essence of structuralism holds that meaning is discovered through knowing the structure of things.

2.2.3 Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is an approach to knowledge that developed alongside postmodernism. On the one hand it involves, the rejection of "cultural certainties that structuralism had been felt to embody; certainties such as the belief that the world was intrinsically knowable, and that structuralism gave us a key to unlock the various systems that made up that world" (Sim 1999:4). On the other hand it involves the extension, re-evaluation and reinterpretation of structuralist ideas (Cullum-Swan, B & Manning 1994:467).

Poststructuralism is in some ways a reaction to structuralism and in other ways an advancement of structuralism. Exactly where the dividing line lies differs from one critic to another. It is important to note that structuralism took as its starting point the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Therefore poststructuralism, in the position of re-evaluating structuralism, mainly deals with issues pertaining to language, although its applications are much wider.⁷

The work of Jacques Derrida is pivotal in the understanding of poststructuralism.⁸

⁷ Postmodernism and poststructuralism have so many things in common that it is often difficult to distinguish between the two (Sarup 1993:144). However, it can be said that postmodernism entails a broader philosophical approach and that poststructuralism focusses more specifically on language and meaning, deconstructions thereof and the implications of the deconstruction of language and meaning in other fields apart from linguistics. However, the terms are often used in a nuanced way (Sarup 1993:131) which will be the case in this study.

⁸ The scope of poststructuralism is enormous. The limits of this paper does not allow for an extensive overview. I choose to single Derrida out as an important influence because of the enormous impact of his work. Jaques Derrida (1930-2004) was a philosopher, who to large degree defined approaches within postmodernism. He was of Algerian origin, but later practiced in France and America. He "was best known for his work on the relation between thought and language with its playful interrogation of the borders between philosophical and literary writing" (Sim 1999:226). Amongst other concepts, he introduced the concepts of deconstruction and *différance* and some of his most important works are *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *Dissemination* (1972) (Sim 1999:226-7).

Derrida radically re-evaluates the work of his predecessors such as Levi-Strauss, Husserl, Lacan and notably Ferdinand de Saussure and his theory of language (Harland 1987:125). To re-evaluate their work, Derrida uses the method of deconstruction, a guiding concept in poststructuralism (Birns 2001:86).

Deconstruction is a questioning manner of engaging critically with a text. The aim is to expose how ideas and concepts “dismantle themselves” (Palmer 1997:139). It reacts against the ethos of structuralism which claims that concepts are “reducible to the operations of systems” (Sim 1999:5) and that meaning can be discovered once those systems or structures are known and understood (Sarup 1993:3, Margaroni 2002:93). Furthermore, it seeks to reveal the binary opposites in metaphysics⁹ that permeate Western thinking (Palmer 1997:134). It also demonstrates the instability of meaning and the lack of essences within ideas (Harland 1987:135).

Derrida continues to deconstruct the Saussearean model of linguistics. He refutes the idea that a sign consists of a signifier and signified which together, produce complete meaning. He states that there is no true signified but only signifiers that point to more signifiers (Harland 1987:135; Roman 2001:309). True meaning and essence is not contained within a sign. Meaning is always displaced or “deferred”¹⁰ or can be traced to other signifiers. As a result, every word in the English language contains traces of every other word (Sarup 1993:33).

These assumptions also influence perceptions of meaning. Meaning is not fixed and stable but is fleeting and constructed contextually. Furthermore, every word has a multiplicity of meanings and therefore a variety of equally valid interpretations of a text

9 “Derrida calls ‘metaphysical’ any thought-system which depends on a foundation, a ground or a first principle. First principles are often defined by what they exclude, by a sort of ‘binary opposition’ to other concepts. These principles and their implied ‘binary opposites’ can always be deconstructed” (Sarup 1993:37). Examples of binary oppositions are “signifier/signified, sensible/intelligible, speech/writing” (Sarup 1993:37) and “nature/culture” (Palmer 1997:133). According to Derrida (Palmer 1997:134) one of the poles of these binary oppositions are always preferred as if it was part of the natural order of things. Derrida claims that this preference only demonstrates “cultural manipulations of power” and not the way things have to be. When deconstructed, these binary oppositions “break down and collapse into each other” (Palmer 1997:134).

10 Derrida explained deferred with the example of the sign ‘pharmakon’. The signifier is the writing of the word ‘pharmakon’ and the signified is the meaning the signifier refers to. Pharmakon can mean both poison and remedy. However, poison and remedy can be traced to other meanings and other signifiers as well. Therefore, there is no one stable signified for ‘pharmakon’ and meaning is constantly ‘deferred’ from one signifier to the other. In a specific context the signifier might undisputedly refer to poison. In that case, other possible meanings of ‘pharmakon’ is not destroyed. It is just put on hold for a while until the context changes and the other possible meanings spill over (Brogan 1989:7-23). This explains why context plays such an important role in poststructuralism.

is possible (Sim 1994:6; Birns 2001:85). This assumption also influences the role of the reader when reading a text. Since there is no essential meaning to be discovered in a text, the reader has to interact with the text in order to construct meaning (Smyth 1991:11; Sarup 1993:3). Stanley Fish, a literary theorist, agrees by stating that "a text is not a text without a reader and a context" (Chandler 1995).

By exposing the "instability of language" (Sim 1999:5) Derrida also implies the instability and the lack of essences in other systems. This can be seen in his critique of the phenomenology of Husserl and the psychoanalysis of Lacan (Harland 1987:125). The philosophies and deconstruction of Derrida also impacted greatly on narrative studies, as I will show in 2.4.1.

2.3 Structuralism and the science of narratology

Similarly, a structuralist approach is not only applicable to language but also to other systems of knowledge. "The techniques for uncovering the general grammar of language can serve as a model for similar analysis in other areas of human social endeavour" (De George & De George 1972:xx). Claude Lévi-Strauss applies structural analysis to anthropology, Jacques Lacan to psycho analysis Louis Althusser to Marxist theory and Roland Barthes in literary analysis (De George & De George 1972:xi; Canning 2001:381).

Barthes and other scholars like Propp, Todorov, Greimas, Genette, Bal and Stanzel are some of the leading thinkers associated with the structuralist analysis of narratives in narratology (Pal [O]). Narratology developed as a branch of literary studies. It aims to analyse narrative form and structure and "strive[s] for systematic knowledge of narrative texts" (Pal [O]). Within structuralism, narratives are seen and studied as literary phenomena and a system like any other (Currie 1998:1).

One of the most cited examples of a structuralist analysis of narratives is probably Vladimir Propp's¹¹ analysis of Russian folk tales. Martin Barker applies Propp's

¹¹ The Russian formalist, Vladimir Propp, studied a collection of 115 Russian fairy tales. He set out to find similar and recurring elements, in order to expose a basic structure which all these stories shared. Although there might be seemingly glaring differences in terms of characters, settings and other story elements in different stories, Propp argues that they fulfil the same functions. He argues that there are only 31 functions and they always appear in the same order. Apart from the functions, he also identifies seven different types of characters: The villain, doner/provider/, hero (seeker or victim) and the false hero. These characters may fulfil different roles but essentially remain one of the seven basic characters (Toolan 2001:17-21).

approach when analysing the comic *Scream Inn*.¹² These are his reasons for doing so.

This is not a study of folk tales, though perhaps there are important analogies between them and comics. But I believe that it is possible, with care, to transfer Propp's method. For comics and folk tales are certainly alike in two respects: They are both examples of 'formulaic literature' That is, they embody repeating patterns; and they are not in the main produced by 'named authors' whose particular authorship is stamped on the stories. A method that throws light on folk tales, then, might just prove useful, on our material (Barker 1989:67).

On closer inspection, it seems as if Barker's application of Propp's approach would only be applicable to particular types of comics and cultural phenomena. Although Barker maintains that comics¹³ are formulaic and not produced by a named author, this is not true of all comics. Certainly, the example *Scream Inn* which Barker chose to analyse is formulaic and not produced by a "named author." *Šoba*, the example I will reflect on, is undisputedly associated with Joe Sacco and not formulaic in the sense that Barker suggests *Scream Inn* is.

Furthermore, it seems as if Barker's method is only applicable when looking at a large body of work. In such instances, patterns can be detected in the larger context of the work. However, this approach doesn't seem useful when looking at only one example of a comic, as I plan to do with *Šoba*. Also, Propp's model is seemingly suited for work of a repetitive nature: a comic that appears weekly, a soap opera that appears daily or a romantic novel that forms part of an extended series of similar books.

Sacco's work appears irregularly and the context of his work is always different. Certainly, repetitive attributes can be detected, for example his stylistic approach and his appearance as a character in all of his stories. However looking for those prescribed patterns doesn't seem helpful in understanding the inconsistencies and complexities of his work. It only provides explanations for the aspects that fit the pattern of Propp or Barker, and not the aspects that do not.

Furthermore Barker's application of Propp's approach seems more applicable to fictional work. In such cases it is more possible to manipulate content to suit a specific

12 *Scream Inn* appeared in two IPC comics between 10 March 1973 and 1 October 1977. The two comics were *Shiver and Shake* and *Whoopie!* It ran for four and a half years (Barker 1989:62).

13 I choose to use McCloud's definition of comics (see list of terms), which separate the form from the content. According to McCloud a comic doesn't have to be funny or comical, but is defined according to its formal characteristics.

formula. When the work is perceived as being non-fictional, there might be things that the author tries to remain faithful to and cannot be manipulated to suit a formula.

With the example of Barker's application of Propp's approach in mind, it is clear to me that a structuralist analysis of a narrative does not allow room for exploration outside the prescribed structure (Sim 1999:4-10, Culler 1994:21). In Propp's approach there exists a definite sense of scientific finality about his findings, a reductionism that seems almost engineered to generate specific results. Although this might be insightful, poststructuralist thinkers assume it is not the complete picture (Pal [O]).

However, the structural analysis of narratives is not only based on the work of Propp. Other scholars accentuate different aspects of structural analysis.¹⁴ Within the broad structuralist framework, a set of terminology developed that is often applied to the analysis of literary narratives. The list includes concepts such as author, narrator, narratee, focalization,¹⁵ characterisation, time, duration and frequency (Toolan 2001; Rimmon-Keenan 1983; Bal 1999, Currie 1998).¹⁶

The commonality among the different types of structuralist analysis is "a conviction that surface events and phenomena are to be explained by structures, data, and phenomena below the surface" (De George & De George 1972: xii). This assumption also applies to the meaning of any narrative. Structuralism sees meaning as a product of the underlying structures and an essence that can be uncovered by understanding the structures that produce it (Culler 1994:21; Sarup 1993:3).

Poststructuralism led to the belief that systematic knowledge of narratives was impossible, the very point that structuralists tried to prove (Pal [O]). This led to a complete re-evaluation in narratology. In the next section I will introduce the influence that poststructuralism contributed to the study of narratives.

14 Barthes, for example accentuated different levels of analysis when looking at a narrative, and "proposed three major levels of narrative structure.": 1. functions (similar to Propp), 2. actions, 3. narration (Toolan 2001:2).

15 See list of terms for a definition of focalisation. An example of where narratological terms were applied to visual art can be found in Mieke Bal's narratological analysis of paintings (Bal 1999:161-170). Similarly Deborah Shamoony (2003:146-160) has employed narratological terminology, focusing on focalisation, in her study of the comics of Uchida Shungiku.

16 These terms, as will be explained in 2.4.2, can still be useful in a poststructuralist reflection on a narrative. In my reflection on *Šoba* in chapter 4, I will incorporate the term characterisation. The difference is that in structuralism these terms were applied with scientific rigour, resulting in an often clinical and technical analysis, whereas in poststructuralism reflections are more open ended, fluid and interpretive.

2.4 Poststructuralism and narrative studies

Within a poststructuralist paradigm, narratology changed by embracing open ended, less scientific and more interpretive approaches when studying narratives.

2.4.1 A new view of narrative

Structuralism professes that scientific knowledge is the gateway to obtaining truth and an accurate picture of reality (Appignanesi & Garrat 1999:48-5). In poststructuralism, narrative knowledge extends the idea of scientific knowledge (Sarup 1993:135). As Docherty (1993:25) states, "rather than knowing the stable essence of a thing, we begin to tell the story of the event of judging it, and to enact the narrative of how it changes consciousness and thus produces a new knowledge."

In the poststructuralist paradigm, a single universal truth and objectivity is accepted as being unobtainable. This leads to the recognition of subjective experience as a valid entry point into knowing and the creation of localised truth. A narrative - or story - represents personal knowledge that was acquired through experience. Where narratives were previously seen as "vehicles to transfer knowledge" (Sim 1999:9) narratives are recognised as ways of creating knowledge and meaning (Josselson & Liebliech 1995:33). This re-evaluation of narratives from a poststructuralist position had a strong influence on perceptions of history, identity and power.

2.4.1.1 Narrative and history

A modernist and particularly structuralist understanding of history, proposes that "there [is] an underlying unity or direction to human history" (Docherty 1993:2). This implies that a truthful, factual and often singular version of events exists. Poststructuralism questions this assumption. History is mainly seen as a textual entity, not an external reality, existing in written texts about the past (Huyssen 1993:229; Jameson 1993:75).

The modernist idea of an official, correct history served the West's political desire for domination and in the process repressed the histories of minorities. Poststructuralism is "suspicious of such a 'universal history' or metanarrative" (Docherty 1993:445) and acknowledges alternative histories¹⁷ as equally valid interpretations of the past (Crimp 1993:175). Modernist "structures and complex chronologies of history" lose authority and power as they fragment into infinite, supposedly equal interpretations of the same

events (Stevenson 1991:25). From a poststructuralist position, history becomes a collection of people's narratives, not the undisputed truth about what really happened in the past as Scheub notes

Story is a means whereby people come to terms with their lives, their past; it is a way of understanding their relationship within the context of their traditions. It is a means of accessing and valuing history: in the end story is history. And this means – because of the very nature of story as never being frozen in time – that history is constantly being revisited and retold (Scheub 1998:21).

Šoba is a narrative based on the historic events of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war. Through studying *Šoba* as a valid interpretation of those events, the plurality of history in a poststructuralist context is acknowledged. Furthermore, a poststructuralist position not only shapes perceptions on history but also perceptions of personhood. This will be explored in the next section.

2.4.1.2 Narrative personality and identity

A widely accepted understanding of personality as an essentialist phenomenon developed against the backdrop of modernism (Gergen 1994:202). Essentialist refers to objects and people possessing an essence or core which explain their behaviour. According to this view an outgoing person is extroverted because something in her essence pre-determines that kind of behaviour (Burr 1998:19; Gergen 1999:80). However, from a position of poststructuralism, the traditional, generally accepted theories of personality are questioned (Scwhandt 1994:125).

Social construction, a poststructuralist movement in the human sciences, prefers to refer to identity rather than personality. Identity is preferred because of its lack of essentialist associations. Identity is seen "as the product of social encounters and relationships. It implies that we "create rather than discover ourselves and other people" in social interaction (Burr 1998:28-29). This also explains certain behavioural inconsistencies in people. According to social construction, people are not untrue to themselves if they act differently in different relationships - they are only displaying a variety of selves constructed in different social contexts (Gergen 1999:81-82).

A social constructionist concept of identity, regards narrative as the unifying element amongst the different selves and experiences (Gergen 1999:70). Burr (1998:31)

17 Huyssen (1993:230) points out that there is an ongoing search for tradition and history today "that manifests itself ...in the search for woman's history, in the rejection of centralisms, mainstreams and melting pots of all kinds, and in the great value put on difference and otherness."

summarizes this by saying:

memory allows us to look back on our behaviours and experiences, to select those that seem to 'hang together' in some narrative framework...and to look for patterns, repetitions and so on that provide us with the impression of continuity and coherence.

In a very real sense then, the narratives that people construct about and around their experiences become their identities. Apart from identity being seen as a social construct, it can also be seen as a narrative construct (Scheub 1998:3; Currie 1998:17). Riessmann (1993:2) echoes this when saying that "[i]ndividuals become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives." Šoba's narrative, interwoven with Sacco's narrative, then, becomes part of the process of them constructing their identities.

2.4.1.3 Narrative and power

Knowledge and power are inextricably connected. Lyotard and Foucault agree that knowledge creates discourses which create power (Palmer 1997:119). This leads to Lyotard's conclusion that "whoever controls knowledge...exerts political control" (Sim 1999:8). Burr (1998:64) defines knowledge as "the particular construction or version of a phenomenon that has received the stamp of "truth" in our society." People who have access to this knowledge are powerful and in the position approve of certain constructions of identity and condemn others.¹⁸ Thus metanarratives are created. Metanarratives are characteristic of modernism and structuralism. They claim to have access to universal truth and knowledge. Furthermore they institutionalise power and dominant ideologies (Sarup 1993:325), which in turn leads to the suppression of minorities and the denial of the individual's freedom and creativity.

Lyotard argues for a shift of focus to "little narratives." Little narratives concentrate on the narratives of individuals and stress "localized creativity" and knowledge (Sarup 1993:146). Furthermore, little narratives protest against the subjugation of oppressing metanarratives by acknowledging customised knowledge that splinter and challenge the universal claims of metanarratives (Sim 1999:9). Put simply, society's personality becomes an identity of multiple stories and experiences that cannot be minimised into one single all explaining metanarrative.

¹⁸ This is illustrated by the fact that certain constructions of identity such as homosexual, non-white or insane were and are marginalised within Western society (Burr 1998:62-64).

The change from metanarratives to little narratives relates to the distribution of power in society (Skordili 2001:230). This system of privileged knowledge in the hand of a few powerful people, breaks down if the idea of little narratives is accepted. The power of producing truth and knowledge and therefore exerting power, moves away from centralised knowledge systems to the individual (Skordili 2001:231). Truth and knowledge become relative and situational, based on individuals' experiences and interpretations. As a result power becomes more evenly distributed and less abusive.

The recognition of little or local narratives offers the prospect that stories of those who traditionally may be silent are recognised. This shifts power from those controlling the metanarrative to recognising the power of those with little narratives. Šoba is an individual's narrative of historical events but also a little narrative of Sacco's experience.

2.4.2 A new view of narratology

The changes in perspective about narratives naturally impact on narrative studies. From a position of poststructuralism narratives are perceived as being ubiquitous, present in all spheres of life, not only in literature (Godzich in Chambers 1984:xi). Currie (1998:2) suggests that "[e]xamples of narratives in everyday life are films, music videos, advertisements, songs, comic strips, anecdotes, jokes, stories of our holidays and accounts of our day." In this section, I will rely on the book *Postmodern Narrative* by Mark Currie¹⁹ to explain a new view on narratology.

Currie calls this shift from a literary to a broader understanding of narratives, the 'diversification' of narratology. Narrative studies now cross the former border of literature and life and include other fields. These developments form part of a process that makes it imperative to develop a narratology that can be applied to narratives everywhere, irrespective of the medium in which they appear. Narratology as a structuralist, literary activity becomes incomplete for the study of narratives as a result of this diversification (Currie 1998:2-4).

The diversification of narratology can be seen in the extent to which narratives are studied in other fields. For example: In anthropology, life stories are gathered in order to understand "shared cultural meanings, the insider's view of a community, and the dynamics of cultural change" (Langness & Frank in Atkinson 1998:15). Within

¹⁹ Mark Currie is an English lecturer at the University of Dundee (Currie 1998).

psychology and family therapy a branch called narrative therapy developed, emphasising the agency of the individual to re-author the meaning of his/her story (Epston & White 1990). By listening to people's life stories, sociologists can better "define an individual's role in the social order of things and the process used to achieve that fit" (Stewart in Atkinson 1998:13).

According to Currie (1998:2), deconstruction causes narratology to lose its status as an "objective science which discovers inherent formal and structural properties in its object narratives." Narratives are no longer perceived as stable structures containing essential meanings. In the new view of narratology, it is accepted that the reading of a narrative imposes structure onto it and not the other way around (Wallace 1986:27).

Furthermore, deconstruction adds complexity to narratology. Narratology, similar to other sciences, previously pursued unity and order, and tried to present narratives as neat entities through reductive readings of them. Within poststructuralist narratology, however, contradiction, complexity and loose ends became celebrated instead of problematic (Currie 1998:3).

In the light of the deconstruction of the old concept of narratology, the term narratology has become problematic to describe the study of narratives. Since it has expanded and outgrown its own structuralist and strictly literary shoes, it seems confusing to refer to the study of narratives in all fields as narratology. Various new terms have developed to describe the process of studying narratives. These include narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly 2000), narrative theory (Currie 1998) and narrative studies (Josselson & Lieblich 1995). These and other terms are often used interchangeably by different disciplines.

The question now arises whether narratology still exists and if it is still applicable. Currie argues that narratology is indeed still relevant, but only if the contributions of the structuralists are reclaimed, reinterpreted and applied innovatively. Currie (1998:8) summarises the state of poststructuralist narratology as follows:

It is now much more apparent than it used to be that historicist and ideologically orientated critics depend on formalist narratological terminology and models for analysis in order to be able to say anything precise about the history and ideology of narrative. The strength of contemporary narratology lies in the wealth of descriptive resources which were developed by mainly formalist critics and could then be used by critics of a more historicist bent.

Narratology, with its roots in a structuralist and literary past, developed a rich vocabulary. Terms like focalisation, events, time, characterisation and speech representation developed, and were applied with scientific rigour. These concepts were only intended for use in literary analysis. These concepts can still be valuable when narratives are studied in a poststructuralist context. However, a poststructuralist study involving these concepts would be more contextual, less certain, more subjective and possibly more interdisciplinary.

Simultaneously, other disciplines are now also provided with the opportunity to incorporate literary and linguistic perspectives in their reflections on narratives. In the light of the above, it seems safe to imply that narratology, or rather the study of narrative, has become a pluralistic and interdisciplinary field.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the context of poststructuralism and narrative studies, the historical and philosophical background against which I will reflect on *Šoba*.

Firstly, I discussed structuralism and poststructuralism separately, paying attention to the complex relationship that exists between them. I showed that the transition from a structuralist to a poststructuralist approach resulted in radical changes in how narratives are understood. Furthermore, I explained how narratives construct our social realities, influence our worldviews and thus have a great impact on how we understand ourselves in a poststructuralist world.

Secondly, I explored how narratives are studied differently from a structuralist position than from a poststructuralist position. I elaborated on narratology, the systematic study of narratives within a structuralist paradigm. Then, I discussed how narratology progressed towards a more open ended, less scientific and more interpretive approach, within a poststructuralist paradigm. The term narratology became disputed and terms such as narrative studies and narrative theory began replacing it.

Poststructuralist narrative studies then, will underpin my approach in my reflection on *Šoba* in chapter four. In the light of this chapter, it would be limiting to look at *Šoba* in a simple reductionistic manner. Narratives are complex phenomena and can be studied from a variety of perspectives, informed by a multiplicity of disciplines from which I will draw when reflecting on *Šoba*.

In the next chapter, I will contextualise the work of Joe Sacco further by exploring

comics, journalism and comics journalism. Comics, journalism and comics journalism are approached as narrative art forms. As in the case of narrative studies, comics and journalism were also influenced by poststructuralism, which lead to radical changes in perceptions about them.

Chapter three: Joe Sacco in context: comics, journalism and comics journalism

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed how poststructuralism influenced scholars of narrative's understandings of and approach to narrative. In this chapter I intend to discuss how poststructuralism influenced the respective narrative art forms, namely comics and journalism¹.

My main argument will be that poststructuralism influenced comics and journalism in such a way that common ground developed between these two narrative mediums. Comics extended from being merely a vessel for fantasy and fiction, to including serious and factual subject matter. Journalism on the other hand, developed from exclusively pursuing facts and objectivity to including interpretive and subjective approaches. Hence, these two art forms are now more closely related than before and hold interesting possibilities for further integration. This integration is exemplified in the comics journalism of Joe Sacco.

Firstly I will discuss how a poststructuralist stance influenced textual journalism. Traditional structuralist assumptions about journalism, for example its claim to truth and objectivity, will be explored, as well as the subsequent development of particular journalistic traditions. Furthermore, I will explain how these traditions influenced the work of Sacco.

Secondly, I intend to explore the rich history of visual journalism that exists alongside textual journalism. The illustrated journals of the nineteenth century, photojournalism and war art will be discussed. An extensive historical overview of these three fields is not within the scope of this thesis. Only particular aspects that relate to the work of Sacco will be reflected on. However, a more extensive reflection on the work of Sacco and specifically *Šoba*, can be found in chapter four.

Thirdly, I will consider how poststructuralism expanded the scope of comics and how it led to a demand for realism, intimacy and reflexivity in comics. It will be shown that the production of comics with historical, biographical, autobiographical and journalistic themes is a consequence of the influence of poststructuralism.

¹ Joe Sacco obtained his journalism degree in America (Campbell 2003). Therefore I will refer mainly to the American history of journalism.

The illustrations for this chapter are provided in the addendum (3.7) at the end of this chapter.

3.2 Textual² journalism

Textual journalism was traditionally characterised by its pursuit of truth and objectivity but changed with the influence of poststructuralism. These changes in approach to truth and objectivity led to the development of traditions such as New journalism and muckraking that influenced the work of Joe Sacco.

3.2.1 Journalism, modernism and structuralism

It is generally accepted that mainstream journalism traditionally pursued the objective reporting of factual events (Easton 2005:1³, Miraldi 1990:6; Ettema & Glasser 1998:9, Newton 200:18). Underlying this pursuit is the modernist and structuralist assumption of the possibility to reach an accurate understanding and portrayal of the truth (Burr 1998:13).

The concept of objective journalism coincided with the beginning of the telegraph system in 1844 in the United States (Knowlton and Parsons (1994:89) in Smith [sa]). The telegraph system was expensive and editors of different papers often shared the use of this technology. A reporter sent his news via a telegraph to various papers. Reports then had to be neutral, 'objective' and stripped to essentials in order to be usable in papers with different viewpoints and standards (Knowlton and Parsons (1994:89) in Smith [sa]).

The mechanisation of the Industrial revolution was reflected in the journalism of the time. Lincoln Steffens used the analogy of the machine to describe the role that journalists had to fulfil during the 1890s: "Reporters were to report the news as it

2 Text or textual in this instance means "any form of written material" (*Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary*...2004. Sv. 'text') and not "an occasion for the interplay of multiple codes and perspectives" (Cullum-Swan, B & Manning 1994:463) as cited in the list of terms.

3 I discovered the unpublished article *Comics Journalism: truth and subjectivity in the work of Joe Sacco* by Joellen Easton on 16 August 2005, a late stage in my research. I realised that the direction I was pursuing was similar to hers. I found this affirming on the one hand and alarming on the other. As a consequence, there are similarities between our work. For example, we both draw links between literary journalism and the comics of Joe Sacco and debate truth and subjectivity in his work. I am furthermore indebted to her for finding out about the 19th century illustrated journals and the combat art of World War II. I have permission from her to quote from her article. Easton completed her Master's degree Comparative Media Studies at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is also a radio producer and works as Public Insight Analyst at Minnesota Public Radio (Joellen Easton...2005).

happened, like machines, without prejudice, colour, and without style; all alike" (Miraldi 1990:33).

Furthermore, journalists' most important sources of information were public documents. Facts were deemed all the more credible if they were verified by official papers (Miraldi 1990:33). This practice can be read as a modernist display of faith in authority and centralised knowledge systems (Sarup 1988:143). Schudson (1978:162 in Smith [sa]) states that the use of public documents absolved journalists from accepting responsibility for their writing and led them to upholding the views of the status quo.

3.2.2 Journalism, postmodernism and poststructuralism

Some argue that literary journalism has its roots in the realist writing of the nineteenth century and cite authors such as Zola, Tolstoy and Elliot (Easton 2003). Kaul (1997:xvi) suggests eighteenth century travel writing and sixteenth century personal essays as possible influences. Kaul claims with greater certainty that the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 changed the face of journalism and was the advent of literary journalism.

A year later John Hersey's 'Hiroshima' exploded in the pages of *The New Yorker* launching the post-World War II era of literary journalism that began to flourish as a result of shifting critical and aesthetic sensibilities (Kaul 1997:xv).

A reason for this might be the world's disillusionment with the Modernist ideal of progression and centralised power, demonstrated in the Hiroshima bombing and World War II. If Modernism led to a "world...capable of destroying itself" (Nolan 1986:5) then surely things needed to be re-evaluated and changed. This change included developments in the ways in which events were portrayed in the media through journalism. In the light of these developments, literary journalism emerged. It was marked by the writer's subjectivity and the use of narrative style, as ideas of truth, history and objectivity were increasingly being questioned and challenged (Kaul 1997:xv, xvi).

Literary journalism and its subsequent variations display a variety of poststructuralist characteristics. By using narrative and literary techniques, literary journalism sides itself with Lyotard's claim that narratives create knowledge instead of merely channelling it (Sim 1999:20, Sarup 1993:145). Derrida's view that truth is subjective and situational is supported by the acknowledgment of the writer's subjective voice in

literary journalism. Literary journalists can take responsibility for their reporting without having to fake a complete understanding of reality.

The rise of literary journalism culminated in the explosion of New Journalism⁴ in the 1960s, a term coined by Tom Wolfe (Kramer [sa]). New Journalism further blurred the line between fact and fiction. John Pauly (Kaul 1997:xvi) suggests that it combined "[j]ournalism's empire of facts" with "[l]iterature's garden of imagination." The disintegration of barriers between art and life (Sim 1999:132), history and present (Sim 1999:176) and traditionally opposing disciplines (Sim 1999:126) further displays new journalism's relationship with poststructuralism.

Different variations of literary journalism developed, characterised by a common approach, where the boundaries between fact and fiction became blurred. "Intimate journalism", "creative journalism", "creative non fiction", "documentary narrative", (Harrington 1997: xiii, xv) and "narrative journalism" (Nieman conference...2002) are some of the terms used in loose association with literary journalism. Some critics also associate particular types of Muckraking⁵ with Literary journalism.

It is this strain of journalism, influenced by postmodernism which most strongly corresponds with the journalistic character of Šoba. As Easton (2005:3) states:

Sacco's style doesn't follow traditional journalistic conventions – he inserts himself into the story, his biases are frequently clear, he betrays emotion... and he seems to write with advocacy in mind. He doesn't tell stories to make the news: He covers space, time and multiple experiences in deep context. Using traditional definitions, if Sacco's work is journalism, it is New Journalism...

In the next section, I will explore how different traditions of visual journalism relate to the work of Joe Sacco.

4 Some refute Wolfe's claim that New Journalism was really "new" or as important as it proclaimed itself to be. Robert Boynton, author of *The New New Journalism*, states that Wolfe distorted the history of journalism by ignoring other important developments, which in Boynton's view, was more influential and interesting than New Journalism. However, he acknowledges that these new new journalists are "indebted to Wolfe's experimentation" (Boynton [sa]). Whether New Journalism was new or not, it still formed part of the upsurge in literary journalism. Some of the journalists associated with New Journalism are Tom Wolfe, Hunter S Thompson, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Joe Eszterhas (Kaul 1997:xv,xvi).

5 Another branch of journalism, Muckraking (or investigative journalism) reached its heights in the mid seventies. (Miraldi 1990:15). Muckrakers actively seek out and exposes wrongs in society with the ultimate aim of reform (Miraldi 1990:14). Although different from literary journalism Muckrakers' commitment to "giving voice to voiceless groups" and "holding private corporations accountable" (Miraldi 1990:155) also betrays Poststructuralist sentiments. Muckraking puts less emphasis on the literary aspect of the narrative than literary journalism. Some believe that literary journalism and muckraking are at the opposites end of the spectrum – the former bastardizing the realm of objectivity in which Muckraking should supposedly operate (Miraldi 1990:155).

3.3 Visual journalism

Other than textual journalism, visual journalism also developed and influenced journalistic traditions. Three traditions of visual journalism, namely the nineteenth century illustrated journals, photojournalism and war art influenced how current events were interpreted through visual representations.

3.3.1 The nineteenth century illustrated journals

Towards the nineteenth century, the illustrated journal⁶ came into being (figure 3.1 and figure 3.2). The illustrated journal was a news magazine, lavishly illustrated with pictures of current events. The illustrators based their drawings on daguerreotype photographs.⁷ Although the daguerreotype had been invented in 1839, photographs could not yet be printed in magazines (Lebeck 2001:20). After the artists completed their drawings they were sent to the editor, who in turn sent them to the engraver to be “interpreted and dramatized” according to popular taste.⁸ Because of poor quality, some of these early photographs “had no artistic merit” (Lebeck 2001:20). In order to add aesthetic value, the illustrators had to simplify and adapt the photos. Since the main emphasis was on accuracy there was not much room for artistic expression (Lebeck 2001:20). Illustrators were essentially draughtsmen, expected to operate like cameras until photographers could replace them.

The illustrators were mostly not responsible for the gathering of visual data. A photograph was handed to them, accompanied by the order to reproduce it as closely as possible. In that respect they were visual journalists only by association – the photographers were operating closer to the definition of visual journalism. This contrasts with Sacco’s direct approach. He submerges himself completely into the world and the lives of the people he reports on (Easton 2005:10).

6 Some of the important illustrated magazines that surfaced were *The Illustrated London News* (London), *L’Illustration* (Paris), *Illustrirte Zeitung* (Leipzig), *La Ilustración* (Madrid) and *Harpers Weekly* (NewYork) (Greenwall 1992:19).

7 Daguerreotype photos is the type of photos that were used by illustrators for reference. It is named after the French inventor Louis Daguerre. In 1826 the first photograph was created by Joseph Niépce. Niépce, Daguerre and his son later joined forces to invent the “first practical and popular photographic process, modestly named the Daguerreotype” (Lester 2002:16).

8 Sources differ on this. According to Greenwall (1992:19) artists did not only work from photos but also from sketches of “special artists” on the front line. In this section I will refer only to the office illustrators – the illustrators and engravers who interpreted the photos and sketches. In the section on war art I will refer to the frontline artists.

The development of print technology threatened the existence of illustration as a form of visual journalism. Once it was possible to reproduce photographs in magazines, photographs started replacing illustrations (Lebeck 2001:40).

3.3.2 Photojournalism⁹

The birth of press photography and photojournalism was a direct result of the invention of the photographic printing process around 1882. Consequently, photographs could be reproduced in magazines and books (Lebeck 2001:40). Illustrations were being substituted by photographs, which were now easily reproduced in the mass media. The belief that photography accurately represented reality prevailed (Veen 2002:42) and photojournalism became an extension of this belief. Newton (2001:5) addresses this phenomenon:

In photojournalism, reporting has too often been considered synonymous with recording. And therein lies the crux of any discussion of visual truth. Photography's inherent capacity for gathering visual information by recording points of light reflecting of physical entities and for conveying that information in a form that looks so much like the world we perceive with our own eyes fostered an early and prevailing assumption about the authenticity of photographic representation (Newton 2001:5).

It was furthermore believed that accurate representation and objectivity were closely related. Today, many scholars agree that objectivity¹⁰ in text and visual journalism is an unobtainable ideal (Newton 2001:6; Ettema & Glasser 1998:9; Edgar 1992:112). Sacco never pretends to operate within the traditional expectations of objectivity and untainted representation, as Easton (2005:5) says: "Because part of his craft is to admit his bias he is a central character in every story he tells...and is reflexive in a way we are more accustomed to seeing in postmodern writing *and other art*." Sacco affirms this in no uncertain terms by stating "I am not an objective journalist" (Sacco 2002).

In photojournalism, the photographic essay is the closest family member of comics. Around 1930 the photo essay became a popular feature in the magazines.¹¹ The photographic essay was "a kind of cinematic short story using static pictures" (Lebeck 2001:112). A variety of factors, notably the introduction of television, resulted in the

⁹ See Lebeck, R & Von Dewitz, B (eds.). 2001. *A history of Photojournalism*. 1839-1973. Bonn: Steidl, for a more complete historical account of photojournalism.

¹⁰ Jack Fuller (Ettema & Glaser 1998:9) "In its purest usage, the term [objectivity] suggested that journalism meant to be so utterly disinterested as to be transparent. The report was to be virtually the thing itself, unrefracted by the mind of the reporter. This, of course, involved a hopelessly naïve notion from the beginning."

¹¹ The leading magazine that published photographic essays was *Life* magazine. *Life* started in 1936 and closed down in 1972. One possible reason for its end was the increasing popularity of television which furthermore became the ideal vessel for advertising (Lebeck 2001:190, 271).

eventual demise of the photo essay. Today photographic essays are seldom found in print media (Lebeck 2001:250), limiting most photographers to use single images to convey their message.

In the photo essay, a theme, scenario and sometimes a narrative is developed through a variety of images. Comics operate similarly, as Sacco says: "with good comics journalism...an atmosphere is created with multiple images" (Sacco 2002). Although the essays are often referred to as 'pictorial narratives' or 'short stories' not all of them are narratives in the strictest sense of the definition. In figure 3.3 it is clear that the pictures are meant to be read in an associative way, although there is not a narrative that develops. The pictures can be read in any order. In figure 3.4 however, there is a specific narrative that develops and the sequence of photos read like the panels of a silent comic.

Traditionally, the roles of the visual and textual journalist were kept separate. News reports were written by text journalists, the photos taken by photographers. Gradually, the roles started merging (Lester 2002:20). Many reasons are cited for this - amongst others, the introduction of the computer (Harris & Lester 2002:3). The integration of poststructuralist sensibilities into the world of journalism is another possibility.

The introduction of the computer into the newsroom caused a revolution in photojournalism. Images could now be digitally recorded, represented and manipulated. Furthermore, the gap between image and text became less. Where text editing and layout previously had to be managed by different people, one software program could now be learned, enabling a single person to do it all. "Everyone involved with word, picture and design production can use a computer....Innovative technology and thinking cause the merger between words and images and the people who produce them" (Harris & Lester 2002:3).¹²

It is in this context that comics journalism has to establish itself. Sacco combines the traditional separate journalistic disciplines, not through the use of the computer, but by choosing to work in the art form of comics. Comics, being a hybrid text-image art form,

¹² A very recent development changed the face of journalism even further. Yahoo Inc. announced on Monday 10 October 2005 that they will begin to include the work of "self-published web-loggers side by side with the work of professional journalists, levelling distinctions between the two." A search for news events on Yahoo will then include all the professional journalist websites as well as the personal comments and views of untrained journalists. In defence of this decision, Jeff Davis, author of a blog states: "You don't need a degree...If you inform the public, you are committing an act of journalism" (Yahoo may be redefining...2005).

challenge traditional assumptions about the separate roles journalists have to fulfil. As the computer facilitates the merge between the roles of writer and image maker in mainstream journalism, comics journalism provides an alternative way to merge these roles. In the context of this contemporary trend to blur the boundaries between journalistic tasks, comics journalism should not need to struggle for cultural recognition.

3.3.3 War Art

Artistic representations of war have existed for a long time. Consequently there are a wide variety of examples with different stylistic and conceptual approaches. Although war art has long been in existence, the practice of sending artists out to the frontline of the battlefield as visual reporters is fairly recent. Greenwall (1992:18) explains how artists have been engaged with the British at war.

For thousands of years artists have been representing war... Yet most of these pictorial records were painted not by eyewitnesses but by artists working much later and at a great distance from the scene. The Crimean War (1854-6) was the first notable struggle to be covered by artists specifically commissioned for this purpose – a so-called “special” artist... Thereafter virtually every colonial war, skirmish or rebellion on the far-flung British Empire was covered by a faithful band of specials.

Another example of Britain at war is the Anglo-Boer War. The Anglo-Boer War is well documented by a rich display of visual journalism as can be seen in figure 3.5 and 3.6. More or less twenty ‘special artists’ were assigned to work on the front. Photos were also taken, but as action scenes proved problematic, illustrators had to recreate them. These illustrators were highly paid, highly skilled individuals, mostly commissioned by the illustrated journals to cover the war (Greenwall 1992:19).¹³ As a result, artists often assumed the magazine’s point of view and became instruments of propaganda (Carruthers 1992:15).

The role of the “special artist”, in many ways, resembles Sacco’s position. His most significant works are based on eyewitness accounts of war and its results. To research *Safe Area Gorazde*, Sacco visited Bosnia during the Civil War in late 1995 and 1996 and travelled to the UN-designated ‘safe areas’ of Eastern Bosnia (Easton 2005:2).

¹³ The “special” artists were commissioned as frontline illustrators only and were distinguished from the soldier artists and the artist correspondents. The soldier artists were primarily soldiers who at times volunteered their artistic ability to document the war (Greenwall 1992:33). Artist correspondents “were not specifically artists...but possessed enough artistic ability to augment their stories with helpful sketches and photographs” (Greenwall 1992:27).

However, in other ways, Sacco is unlike the “special artists.” He is not a highly paid mouthpiece for a popular magazine. The success of his books, he admits, is for the first time in ten years giving him “some financial breathing space” (Campbell 2003). The views he present are his own and he supports himself with his own resources (Sacco 2002). As he became better known, he received some commissions to shorter but similar work. For example, *Details* magazine sent him to The Hague to cover the Bosnian War Crime Trials (Questions and answers...[sa]). Yet, even when commissioned and paid, his voice is unmistakably his own and not primarily influenced by his employers.

In America, during the Second World War, there were several war art programs in existence. Although by then photography was well advanced, war artists were nevertheless commissioned to document the war (They drew fire...[sa]). A *New York Times* review of a combat art show in 1943 suggests that “It is the intimate, personal, penetratingly perceptive touch, indeed, that is equipped to furnish a chapter that would have been missing were the camera exclusively relied upon” (They drew fire...[sa]). It seems as if people understood that illustrated material on war events provided an alternative perspective to photography.

By placing Sacco in the historical context of visual journalism, one can see that frontline visual journalism is not new or “unusual” (Easton 2005:12). Today however, apart from photography, that tradition is largely lost. Sacco’s work can be seen as an extension, but at the same time, a subversion of traditions within visual journalism. Comics allow him to work independently, merge journalistic roles, be subjective and reflexive, and in doing so, to challenge expectations of journalism. In the next section I will discuss how the changes that occurred within comics, prepared it for the introduction of journalism.

3. 4 Comics

Poststructuralism expanded the scope of comics leading to a demand for realism¹⁴, intimacy and reflexivity. Therefore, comics with historical, biographical,

¹⁴ A work of art, for example a novel or comic, can be described as realistic or as displaying realism if it provides a “convincing illusion of life” through believable characters and settings (Peck and Coyle 1993:120). It aims to represent “the quality of being very like real life” (*Oxford’s Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*...2004. Sv. ‘realism’). Furthermore, a realistic artwork often reflects on the intricacies of life and the many facets and complexities involved in all incidents, significant and insignificant (Peck and Coyle 1993:120).

autobiographical and journalistic themes can be seen as a consequence of the influence of poststructuralism.

3.4.1 Introduction

Joe Sacco's comics can be loosely categorised as alternative comics (Sabin 1996:214). This category emerged during the 1980s and was directly influenced by the underground comics of the 1960s (Sabin 1996:177). I will provide a historical context for the developments in comics in an attempt to better position Joe Sacco's work and the role of poststructuralism in his work. Roger Sabin's¹⁵ *Comics, comix & graphic novels: a history of comic art* will be my central reference. Due to the scope of this paper, I will limit myself to the history of comics in America, and to a lesser degree, Britain.

The origin of comics is a subject of great debate. Different critics suggest dissimilar starting points (McCloud 1993:15; Sabin 1996:11; Horn 1976:9). I argue that all forms of visual communication - typography, journalism, graphic design (Lester 2002: 11-19; Eisner 1985:13) and comics - have the same roots. All these disciplines originate from man's desire to document and communicate, as can be seen in prehistoric cave drawings (Lester 2002:11).

From the earliest cave drawings, specialised forms of communication developed into separate branches (Lester 2002:1-19). It is not within the scope of this paper to trace the history of comics from such an early starting point. I will pick up on the history of comics with the emergence of broadsheets in the middle ages, when it became a popular mass medium (Kunzle 1973:3).

3.4.2 Early comics

Broadsheets represent the earliest form of the comic strip and emerged during the middle ages. In Germany, Holland and England, broadsheets became particularly popular during the fifteenth to the eighteenth century (Kunzle1973:4). Printed on one side of a parchment, broadsheets were uncomplicated woodcut prints that combined text and images, usually depicting religious subject matter and news events. Executions and tortures scenes were particularly popular topics (Sabin 1996:1; McCloud 1994:16; Kunzle 1973:15-18).

¹⁵ Roger Sabin is an acclaimed writer and arts journalist who regularly contributes to publications, radio and television documentaries on comics. He authored two books namely *Adult comics: An introduction* (with Martin Barker) and *The lasting of the Mohicans*. Furthermore he teaches at central St Martins College of Art in London (Sabin 1996).

The broadsheets gradually started including political satire and humour. Copperplate engravings replaced woodcuts and printing improved. A well supported "satire industry" developed in Britain, featuring artists such as William Hogarth, James Gillray and George Cruickshank (Sabin 1996:12). Further improvements in printing and binding technology led to the development of magazines. In effect, magazines were a number of broadsheets bound together. Magazines spawned the development of illustrated journals that were mostly documentary in nature. In addition to the journals, a line of visually rich humorous magazines developed¹⁶ (Sabin 1996: 12-15, Gieber...[sa]).

In America, the newspaper industry sparked the expansion of comics (Sabin 1996:19; Horn 1976:11; Glubok 1979:3). Comics started as humorous single image drawings in newspapers. Later, longer strips developed, which mostly appeared in Sunday papers. These "Sunday funnies" were extremely popular and well established by the turn of the century¹⁷ (Sabin 1996:20; Glubok 1979:5). Some of these newspaper funnies were collected in book form and became forerunners of modern comic books (Horn 1976:24; Lalumière [sa]; Sabin 1996:24).

According to Sabin (1993:22) before 1914, comics were mostly intended for adults. However, when colour printing became more available, the interest of children in comics increased. This changed the direction and nature of the entire comic market and adult comics became a thing of the past (Sabin 1996:28). Comics produced during this time were mostly comical and humorous (Sabin 1996:27) and catered for a readership between the ages of eight and twelve as Sabin notes, "[comics] were produced almost exclusively for children" (Sabin1993:23). This remained so until the emergence of underground comics in the sixties.

The comics of the period before 1914, contributed to the common stereotype that comics are exclusively for children and should be amusing. Although many developments since that period subverted the idea that comics are only for children, it is still today a common misconception that it is a juvenile art form. However, it is

16 The first continuing British comic character, "Ally Sloper" appeared during this time in the weekly magazine *Ally Sloper's half holiday*. According to Sabin this marks the introduction of the modern comic. Many comics and humorous titles followed and by the late 1890s comics were extremely popular. One of the most influential humorous magazines was *Punch* magazine (Sabin1996:15).

17 The three most important from this time are George Herriman (*Krazy Kat*), Winsor McKay (*Little Nemo in Slumberland*) and Lyonel Feininger (*The Kin-der-kids*) (Sabin 1996:20,21; Horn 1976: 12;14;16, Glubok 1979:6,9,15)

interesting to realise that before 1914, it was mostly adults who read comics. In this light then, it is quite strange that the adult and alternative comics of today are often not taken seriously by the mainstream public.

3.4.3 Adventure comics and superheroes

Before 1930 in America, adventure comics were introduced in small increments.

Tarzan that appeared in 1929 was one of the first definitive examples of an adventure comic (Sabin 1996:54; Glubok 1979:31-35). Between 1930 and 1940 the adventure genre rapidly expanded (Horn 1976:22-23). One explanation for this was the crash of the stock market in October 1929. People preferred escapist entertainment that diverted their attention from the depression (Sabin 1996:54).¹⁸

Superhero comics succeeded adventure comics. *The Phantom*, although not a superhero was the first costumed character and was followed by the costumed superheroes (Sabin 1996:54). *Superman*, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, was published in 1938 and set the tone for superheroes to follow (Sabin 1996:57, Horn 1976:24; Reynolds 1992:8). *Batman* appeared in 1939.¹⁹ Together, they were the two most influential and commercially successful superheroes. Apart from them, *Captain Marvel*, *Captain America*, *Wonder Woman* and *Plastic Man* also staked a claim on the Superhero scene (Sabin 1996:61-63, 66; Lalumière [sa]).

Superhero comics became such a strong identity that even today, many people still think of comics as exclusively related to superheroes. Easton (2005:11) states, that the preconception of comics being almost exclusively about superheroes, can be detected in the following extract from a review of Sacco's work in the *Dallas Observer*: "It is not enough to celebrate Sacco's work for what it isn't, comic books without superheroes."

3.4.4 Comics after World War Two

By the late 1940s, America's social climate had changed. The war was over and the demand for superheroes declined. Consequently, new subject matter including "[w]esterns, detective, crime, war, science fiction and horror" was introduced (Sabin 1996:66; Reynolds 1992:8). Depictions of violence increased, especially in crime and horror comics. Eventually, it led to public outrage.

18 Strips such as *Dick Tracy*, *Flash Gordon*, *Buck Rogers* and *The Phantom* featured (Sabin 1996:54).

19 Strictly speaking, *Batman* was not a superhero. Although he was very athletic, he had no superpowers. He relied heavily on his sidekick Robin and had a variety of gadgets which he used (Sabin 1996:61).

The public debate peaked with the appearance of the book, *Seduction of the innocent*, by the psychiatrist Frederic Wertham (Nyberg 1998:85). He claimed that violence in comics was morally degrading to children and led to juvenile delinquency. As a result, authorities enforced censorship in the form of the comic code authority. The comic code imposed restrictions on subjects such as the depiction of violence, sex and opposition to authority. Comics that adhered to these rules carried a stamp of the code on their covers. These developments resulted in a near destruction of the comics industry. "Whole genres were virtually destroyed: horror and crime were especially badly hit, but war, westerns, romance and even superhero titles suffered" (Sabin 1996:68). Apart from almost completely ruining the comics industry, the censorship of the code severely stunted the growth and development of comics (Lalumière [sa]; Sabin 1996:66-68; Horn 1976:30; Reynolds 1992:9). Although the comics code has been somewhat relaxed it is still operational today.

The comics industry had to radically readjust. Superhero²⁰ comics made a comeback, but this time with a different emphasis. Instead of focussing on violence and horror in situations, the stories were centred on the complexities of the superheroes' personalities and lives (Sabin 1996:69; Reynolds 1992:9).²¹

The establishment of the comics code stopped the natural progress of comics as an artform.²² As a result mainstream comics were stuck in an infantile state and only allowed to develop in the 1980s as I will discuss 3.4.5. The comics code became a modernist discourse of power that suppressed development of anything that contradicted the accepted notions of respectability and proper entertainment.

3.4.5 Underground comics in the 1960s

In reaction against the comics code and establishment in general, underground comics surfaced in the late 1960s. The subject matter included sex, drugs, rock music and politics.²³ Needless to say, it was intended for an adult readership. The underground

20 Most notably, *The Amazing Spiderman* appeared. Other heroes such as *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Silver Surfer* and *The Avengers* also came into being (Sabin 1996:74).

21 From this time came *The Fantastic Four*, X-men, *The Silver Surfer*, *The Hulk* and importantly, *Spiderman*. Until the end of the sixties, superhero comics were fairly popular (Sabin 1996:74).

22 It is peculiar that film and theatre, also combinations of text (although sound) and image have "long ago established their credentials, [while] comics still struggle for acceptance" (Eisner 2000:3). One possible reason for this might be the comics code which forced the art form to halt its natural progression.

23 Because of its x-rated content, underground comics are often referred to as "comix." Sometimes the term is also applied to alternative comics (Sabin & Triggs 2003:13)

artists distanced themselves from the mainstream conventional morality by producing comics that wouldn't meet the criteria of the comics code. To a large extent the underground comics were also a mouthpiece for the hippie generation and demonstrated an awakening of political awareness amongst the youth (Sabin 1993:36-37; Sabin 1996:92). During this period, comics published by woman appeared for the first time (Sabin 1996:104).

Underground comics suffered several attacks from authorities because of their content. Costly court cases forced many small publishers and comics shops to close down or tone down the content of their comics. As a result, the underground scene plummeted. However, some of the underground's content filtered through to the mainstream. Arguably, the best of the underground comics movement, notably Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton, survived (Sabin 1996:117,119).

In underground comics, a postmodern questioning of metanarratives can be seen. Also, the surfacing of previously suppressed comic artists resulted in a postmodern plurality of voices. This will be further discussed in 3.5.1.

3.4.6 Comics during the 70s and 80s

Mainstream comics of the seventies were mostly concerned with "power fantasies about macho muscle men" (Sabin 1996:157). Comics such as *Swamp thing* and *Daredevil* were created (Sabin 1996:158, 160). During the 1980s mainstream comics gradually became more sophisticated in their approach and subject matter. *Batman: A Dark Knight Returns* (1987) by Frank Miller and *Watchmen* (1986) by Dave Moore and Alan Gibbons embodied this change. The heroes were now fallible and psychologically complex and the stories did not rely on previous superhero formulas of supernatural action (Reynolds 1992:97; Sabin 1993:88-89; Sabin 1996:162).

These comics were now marketed as graphic novels, implying that they were sold in book form and not in separate editions. This was partly a marketing strategy through which publishers hoped to reach an adult market that would be interested in this new form of literature. The reason for this was to break the alliance with comics and the belief that it was meant for children and to establish them as novels (Nyberg

1998:162). Although graphic novels were not a new invention,²⁴ it was marketed as a separate “genre” for the first time (Sabin 1996:165).

Through the appearance of *Watchmen* and *A Dark Knight Returns* comics moved in the direction of appealing to adults and breaking down existing stereotypes associated with the art form. These developments paved the way for other mature and sophisticated comics that were to follow.

3.4.7 “Alternative”²⁵ comics

During the 1980s and 1990s alternative comics developed parallel to mainstream comics. The influence of the underground comics of the sixties found new expression in the development of alternative comics (Sabin 1996:165; Sabin & Triggs 2003:13).

Alternative comics were diverse in subject matter, style and approach. Unlike mainstream comics, the emphasis was not on money making but on creative excellence and experimentation. Small publishers printed comics in small print runs. *RAW* magazine, with Art Spiegelman as editor, was particularly influential in the development of alternative comics (Sabin 1996: 177-178; Wepman 1990:343).

One graphic novel, *Maus*, demands further attention and explanation. First serialised in *RAW*, *Maus* was later published as a graphic novel between 1986 and 1987. In 1992 *Maus* won the Pulitzer prize for literature²⁶ (Sabin 1996:188). This achievement drew attention to the power of the art form and its capacity to portray serious subject matter (Wepman 1990:343). At the same time *Maus* created a standard and platform for artists with similar visions to work from.

Although alternative comics have their roots in the rebellious underground comics of the 60s, there are differences. Whereas the subject matter of underground comics was mostly concerned with the themes of hippie culture such as drug and sex experiences and political liberation (Sabin 1996:32), alternative comics draw from a larger spectrum

24 Graphic novels can be defined as “lengthy comics in a book form with thematic unity.” Examples of these can be located throughout the history of comics since the 1940s. Examples are the *Tintin* series and *A Contract with God* (1978) by Will Eisner (Sabin 1996:165)

25 “Alternative” comics means that these comics are alternative to the mainstream, which consists of superhero and daily comics. It does not mean that the subject matter is necessarily subversive and controversial.

26 In *Maus*, Art Spiegelman, creator of the comic, deals with the survival tale of his father as a Jew during the Holocaust. Spiegelman anthropomorphised the story by depicting Jews as mice, Nazis as cats and Poles as pigs (Sabin 1996:182).

of styles and subject matter. Although alternative comics also address “radical politics, sex and hardcore horror” a large portion of alternative comics is also devoted to autobiographical, biographical and historical themes (Sabin 1996:177).

In both underground and alternative comics, there is often some brutal unflattering honesty, self criticism, and intimacy to be found. In alternative comics, it can be seen in the work of the Canadian artists Joe Matt in his comic *Peepshow: A Cartoon Diary of Joe Matt* and Julie Doucet in *My New York Diary*. It also seems as if there is also a greater presence and demand for realism than in the underground comics, as seen in *Maus. Šoba*, the comic on which I will reflect in chapter four, also illustrates this display of realism and intimacy, characteristic of alternative comics.

In the next section, I will relate the influence of poststructuralism and postmodernism to the development of underground and alternative comics.

3.5 Poststructuralism and comics

The influence of the intellectual climate of post modernism and particularly poststructuralism is seen in the realism and intimacy that characterise underground and alternative comics.

3.5.1 Underground comics

The emergence of underground comics coincided with the awakening of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Some apparent parallels can be drawn between the awakening intellectual climate of the time and the comics of the 1960s. Apart from the influence of postructuralism on underground comics, alternative comics developed from this influence and built on it.

Underground comics incarnate an unmistakable postmodern disdain for authority. The comics code can be seen as the modernist “dominant cultural authority.” In modernist fashion it attempted to centralise power, enforce authority, control and censors. It was the ruling metanarrative of the time, the metanarrative that underground comics attempted to deconstruct.

Restrictions stipulated by the code were unashamedly ignored and the compulsory stamp was glaringly absent on the covers of the comics. The opposition to authority that prescribed certain types of behaviour and entertainment, is also present in other types of postmodern writing, as Lee (1990:xii) notes, “postmodern fiction, then, plays

(seriously) with the structures of authority. It exists in the liminal space between power and subversion..." Through the graphic portrayal of taboo subjects underground comics question the imposed limitations as embodied by "dominant cultural authority" (Lee 1990:xi).

The restrictions, according to the code, had made only particular types of comics acceptable. Through underground comics, artists that produced challenging and 'unacceptable' comics, came to the front, resulting in a postmodern plurality (Sardar 2000) of voices. Suddenly, a variety of comic artists, and topics, not limited to the superhero and adventure genre, appeared. These included women's comics and gay liberation comics. In line with modernist conventions, comics up to that point had been an almost exclusive male endeavour.

During the 1940s and 1950s, many of the comics had been distinctly patriotic and comic artists had been forced to adopt the status quo. Furthermore, social relevance had been prohibited by the code (Sabin 1996:92). In contrast, the underground was now defined by its political consciousness. Issues such as the Vietnam War and the civil right struggle were addressed (Sabin 1996:124). This ties in with Curries' (1998:6) view that narratives and narrative studies became more politicised within postmodernism.

Autobiographical comics, often harbouring embarrassing self-revealing detail featured strongly, especially in the work of Robert Crumb. Personal experiences pertaining to sex and drugs were also often conveyed. Kaul (1997:xvi) notes that "American cultures' fascination with emotion, intimacy and personality [is] a style of postmodern romanticism that counters the bureaucratic routines of everyday life and its muted corporate voices."

Since alternative comics were in part influenced by underground comics the influence of postructuralism relates to alternative comics as well. However, there are some differences that will be discussed in the next section.

3.5.2 Alternative comics

Many underground attributes, such as opposition to the mainstream, inclusion of female artists, intimacy and social relevance were replicated in alternative comics. However, alternative comics seem to be even more diverse than the underground in subject matter and topics they address. This attribute can be seen as an expression of

the pluralism of postmodernism (Sim 1999:336). Sabin (1996:177) states that one of the few definitive things about alternative comics is that they are so diverse.

Within this diversity, it seems as if a larger proportion than before of comics is devoted to realist themes. The abundance of biographical, autobiographical and historical comics illustrates this.²⁷ The demand for 'real life' stories as opposed to purely fictional and fantasy stories possibly speaks of a poststructuralist fascination with the real and questions concerning reality.

In the poststructuralist absence of an objective reality, objective truth and universal experience creates nostalgia for the reality of the past. Baudrillard²⁸ (Pheloung 1999:172) relates this phenomenon to the production of realist work when he states that

there is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production...

The above, then, might partially explain the increase in realist themes in alternative comics. The blurring between reality and fiction and the inclusion of realist themes is also a subject of debate in much postmodern fiction.²⁹ Smyth³⁰ (1991:13) states that

postmodernism can include self-reflexive, metafictional novels or more disparate literary forms like the non-fiction novel, essay, autobiography and combinations of realism and fantasy.

Self reflexivity in alternative comics is another distinctly postmodern trait. Peck and Coyle (1993:121) describe reflexive novels as "novels where the writer draws attention to the fact that he or she is writing a novel." Furthermore, reflexive writers also comment on the complexity and futility of trying to represent human experience (Peck and Coyle 1993:121). Apart from the work of Sacco, self reflexivity can be found in the

27 Artists such as Julie Doucet (*Dirty Plotte*, *My New York Diary*), David B (*Epileptic*), Joe Matt (*Peepshow*), Chester Brown (*It's a Good life if you don't weaken*), Phoebe Gloeckner (*A child's life and other stories*) and Jessica Abel (*Mirror, Window*) work in the domain of biographical and autobiographical comics.

28 Jean Baudrillard (1929 -) is a postmodernist thinker that rejects the notions of structuralism. Many of his arguments deal with the perception of reality in postmodernism. He maintains that, in a postmodern world, it is impossible to discern between what is real and what is simulated. Therefore, he refers to the postmodern world as a world of simulacra (Sim 1999:11). He also refers to hyperreality which is "where reality has entirely disappeared beneath glossy, seductive surfaces of simulation" (Sim 1999:193).

29 Postmodern novelists include Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco, Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, John Barth and John Fowles (Smyth 1991:9).

30 Edmund Smyth has published on contemporary French fiction, drama and film, comparative literature and autobiography. He lectures in French Studies at the University of Liverpool (Smyth 1991:8).

work of many comic artists, most notably Joe Matt, Julie Doucet, Art Spiegelman and Seth.

Fragmentation of the narrative can be seen in the comics of Spiegelman and Sacco. According to Smyth (1991:13) "the fragmentation and discontinuity of the contemporary experience of reality is deemed to be reflected in the plural and mobile structures of postmodern writing."

In alternative comics, an abundance of postmodern and poststructuralist characteristics can be found. In my reflection on *Šoba* in chapter four, I will discuss some of these aspects, such as self reflexivity and fragmentation of the narrative.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, my main argument was that poststructuralism influenced comics and journalism respectively. This influence resulted in common ground between these two narrative art forms. Poststructuralism changed comics from mostly being escapist mainstream entertainment, to including serious and factual themes. Where journalism had previously been concerned with representing facts and objective reporting, it now included subjectivity and interpretation. These changes allowed for the possibility of the integration of the two art forms, as seen in the comics journalism of Joe Sacco.

I firstly discussed the influence of a poststructuralist position on textual journalism. Journalistic traditions such as New Journalism developed in the wake of postmodernism and changed traditional assumptions about truth and objectivity in journalism. The influence of these journalistic traditions can be seen in the work of Sacco.

Secondly I explored the history of visual journalism that existed parallel to textual journalism. I explored three traditions of visual journalism, namely the illustrated journals of the nineteenth century, photojournalism and war art. Through exploring these traditions I tried to show that comics journalism is not an unfamiliar idea, since people have always been interpreting their news through visual representations of events.

Thirdly, I reflected on the influence of poststructuralism on comics. I argued that the introduction of realism, intimacy and reflexivity in comics can be linked to the influence

of poststructuralism. Furthermore the influence of poststructuralism resulted in comics with historical, biographical, autobiographical and journalistic themes.

Another important influence on the development of comics was the 1950s debacle. The introduction of the comics code caused the mainstream of the comics art form to be stuck in an infantile state. Experimental approaches were only possible in the arena of underground and alternative comics arena. Only in the 1980s, with the introduction of *Watchmen* and *A Dark Knight Returns* was the art form allowed to develop further.

As a result of poststructuralism and postmodernism, both comics and journalism now exist in an in between space without any clear guidelines defining the boundaries of reality and fiction. This mutual crisis allows for the merging of the two media in the form of comics journalism. Joe Sacco's work is an example of how these two fields can be fused and illustrates the potential of this art form. In the next chapter I will look more closely at *Šoba*, an example of Sacco's work.

3.7 Illustrations: addendum to chapter three

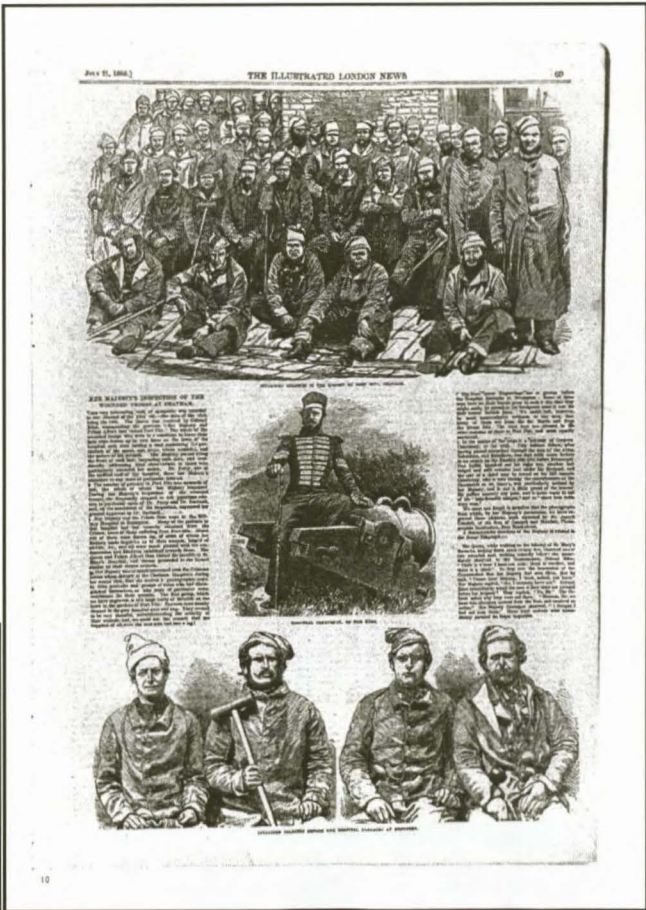




Figure 3.3 Spanish Village (Lebeck 2001:256) by Eugene Smith. As published in *Life* 30 (15), 9 May 1951.

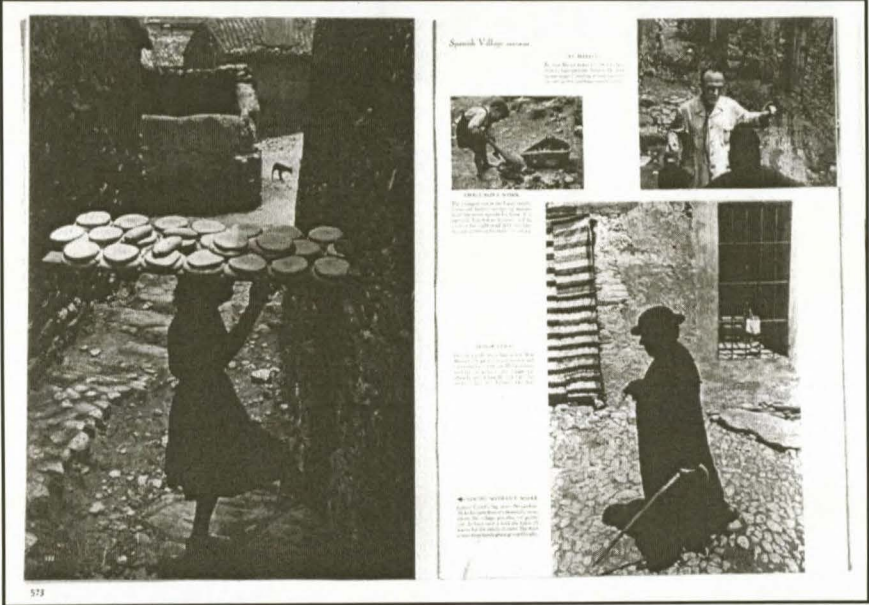


Figure 3.4 Execution of communist policemen by Hungarian rebels. (Lebeck 2001:253) by John Sadovy. As published in *Paris Match* 396.10 November 1956.





Figure 3.5 Saving the guns at Colenso. (Greenwall 1992:25). A watercolour by Sidney Paget.



Figure 3.6 The Scout. (Greenwall 1992:18). Watercolour by W.B. Wollen.

Chapter four: a reflection on *Šoba*

4.1 Introduction

The background I sketched in the previous two chapters serves as a basis for my reflection on *Šoba*. In chapter two I explored poststructuralism and narrative studies in order to situate *Šoba* in the philosophical and historical context of narrative studies. Chapter three showed how the move toward poststructuralism resulted in the perceptual changes that contributed to the merging of comics and journalism. I offered *Šoba* as an example of the merging of comics and journalism. In this chapter I aim to reflect on *Šoba*, using the concepts that emerged from my discussion of poststructuralism, narrative studies, journalism and comics in chapters two and three. These concepts are not limited to one discipline or framework, but overlap and flow into each other. I will use these concepts to reflect deductively on *Šoba*, arguing from the wide to the focussed.¹

Firstly, I will place *Šoba* in a historical context of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war. Secondly I will explore the role of self reflexivity in *Šoba* and show how Sacco, with self aware awareness, demonstrates the process of creating a comic. Thirdly, I will shed light on the role of subjectivity in *Šoba*. Fourthly, I will reflect on the nature of history and truth in Sacco's work, showing how it relates to a poststructuralist approach to truth and history. Subsequently I will consider the use of characterisation and text in *Šoba*, which can be seen as formal characteristics of a comic. Then I will reflect on the fragmentation of the narrative, and subsequently on the creation of meaning in *Šoba*. Lastly, I will discuss some of the limitations and potential of comics journalism. These reflections on *Šoba* do not strive to reach a final conclusion about *Šoba* but rather to tease out complexities and outline alternative ways of perceiving the comic.

4.2 A historical background to the war in Bosnia between 1992-1995

In order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of *Šoba* it is necessary to consider the story in historical context. To this end I provide a summary of Sacco's introduction to *Šoba* (Sacco 1998:i).

The setting for *Šoba* is in the city of Sarajevo in Bosnia. The former Yugoslav state consisted of four main areas namely Croatia in the west, Serbia in the east, with Bosnia in between and Montenegro to the south. Bosnia functioned as a multi ethnic society,

¹ Deductive reasoning is a process of reasoning from the general to the specific. It moves from a pattern (or concept) that might logically or theoretically be expected, to observations that test whether the expected pattern occurs (Inductive and deductive...[sa]).

consisting of Bosnian Serbs who were Orthodox Christians, Bosnian Croats who were Roman Catholics and Bosnian Muslims. These diverse groups lived in relative peace under the reign of Tito in the former Yugoslavia. By the late 1980s the Yugoslav state fell apart and became progressively subjugated by Serbia and its leader Slobodan Milošević, generally considered as a tyrant. Bosnians were left to choose between pursuing independence and staying in the disintegrating state.

The Serbs feared Muslim domination in an independent state. In the former Yugoslavia the Serbs were part of the ethnic majority. In Bosnia, however, they were in the minority. The international community, in support of the Bosnian government, believed that Bosnians could go on living in peace as in the former Yugoslavia. The government was believed to be Muslim dominated although supported by some Serbs and Croats.

The Bosnian Serbs attempted to demarcate separate areas for the separate ethnic groups. However, by 1992, the European community accepted Bosnia as an independent state. This resulted in the systematic killing of Muslims and Croats in Serb controlled areas. In 1992 the Serbs attacked Sarajevo, Bosnia's capital and seat of the government. Peace was eventually declared by 1995, after the intervention of NATO.

Sacco visited Sarajevo in late September of that year, when the war was principally over. There were still sporadic incidents of violence and the uncertainty and hardship caused by the war prevailed. He frequented areas where the battle had raged between the Serbs and the Bosnian government. It is here where he met Šoba, the son of a Muslim father and Serb mother and a soldier for the Bosnian government.

Sacco contextualises *Šoba* by providing an outline of the historic events of the Bosnian war. The comic itself is set in the period immediately after the war, during Sacco's visit to Bosnia. While it is possible to read and enjoy *Šoba* without a historical background, it provides the reader with a broader perspective on *Šoba*.

4.3. Self reflexivity² in *Šoba*

As mentioned in 3.4.7.2, self reflexivity and self awareness in literature is often described as distinctly postmodern attributes (Smyth 1991:1). While a few references to self reflexivity can be found in *Šoba*, they do not appear as frequently as in *Palestine*. In *Palestine*, Sacco often portrays himself with a notebook, making notes and recording interviews (figure 4.1). The reader is constantly reminded that Sacco is

² See list of terms.

occupied with recording the process that became the comic they are busy reading while in *Šoba*, Sacco never depicts himself in the process of documenting his surroundings. However, on page 12 he alludes to the fact that he is busy creating a comic about *Šoba* and his experiences (figure 4.2).

Despite the comparatively small number of references to self reflexivity, the reader is constantly reminded of the fact that the story deals not only with *Šoba*'s experiences during the war but also with Sacco's research process. This awareness is primarily achieved by Sacco including himself as a character in the story. In this way, the comic becomes a reflection on the process of discovering *Šoba*'s story. Sacco doesn't construct *Šoba*'s story from a distant position but becomes an active participant. His self awareness is shown when he reveals his personal thoughts. By situating himself in such a reflexive position and becoming subjectively involved, he confronts the expectation of traditional journalism to lean towards 'objectivity.'

Sacco's presence as a self aware and reflecting character has a powerful effect. It creates a character for the reader to identify with. While *Šoba*'s experiences might seem foreign and daunting to the uninitiated reader, Sacco bridges the gap between the uninformed reader and the foreign by acting as a middleman. Sacco stated after all that his primary audience is the American public – people that, according to Sacco, most likely to have little or no understanding about what is happening in the far corners of the world (Sacco 2002). He portrays himself as a somewhat vulnerable, naïve onlooker. His position makes it easier for the reader to identify with him and share his experiences. Campbell (2003) echoes this by noting that "readers feel they are discovering things at the same speed as Sacco."

4.4. Subjectivity³

In the list of terms I defined subjectivity as those instances when a writer or comic artist allows herself or himself as subject to be included in the process of reflecting on the object. Subjectivity may include personal thoughts and feelings and this is particularly true of Sacco's work in *Šoba*. As explained in 3.3.2, Sacco does not allow the

³ Subjectivity refers to discussions around the human subject, or in simpler terms, discussions around what an individual human being is. In modernism, it was believed that subjects had stable essences that determined who they were. The subject and object (anything that is superficially perceived as not being part of the subject) were perceived as being separate. Subjectivity in postmodern terms, means that subjects are socially constructed through relationships and language. Therefore, the subject and object is not completely separate because both influence the social constructions of each other (Clewell 2001:381). When I refer to a writer or comic artist whose work is subjective, I mean that the writer as subject allows herself as person to be included in the process of reflecting on the object. This could include personal thoughts and feelings.

traditional expectations of objective journalism to restrict him. Schudson (Ettema and Glasser 1998:23) states that the work of good investigative reporters

does not submit uncritically to arbitrary conventions established in the name of objectivity but rather reflects 'mature subjectivity'...a tolerance of uncertainty, and acceptance of risk and commitment to caring for truth.⁴

Šoba provides a worthy example of this mature subjectivity. Sacco portrays a subjective perspective by including himself as a character in the story. Although it is undeniably Sacco's subjective perspective, his subjectivity is never experienced as being intrusive or self centred. One never feels that Sacco is trying to attract attention to himself, his knowledge of the Bosnian war or the personal sacrifices he made in order to create the comic. When he does mention personal matters or grievances, as in *Palestine*, it is always with a touch of irony and self criticism. As Campbell (2003) suggests, "[w]hat makes Sacco's work so powerful is...its lack of self-righteousness."

This display of his subjectivity is not necessarily an obvious approach to take. The story alternates between two modes. There are flashbacks to *Šoba*'s war experiences (figure 4.3) and there are times when *Šoba* and Sacco are interacting informally with one another (figure 4.4). An equally plausible story could have included only the flashbacks of *Šoba*'s war experiences and not the informal interaction between Sacco and *Šoba*. By choosing to portray the informal incidents between himself and the other characters, he makes the reader intensely aware of his subjective presence.

In this way Sacco creates the context of a relationship in which *Šoba* can reveal himself. In this context, *Šoba* displays insights and inconsistencies in his character which will be more fully discussed in 4.3.2. Sacco's presence as a character is not intrusive and self centred but rather creates a context in which readers can familiarise themselves with *Šoba*. In his flashbacks, *Šoba tells* about his experiences during the war. In his relationship with Sacco, he *reveals* his personhood.

Although Sacco has a very strong visual presence in the comic, he very seldom speaks. When he does it is about fairly arbitrary subject matter. He does however, make some of his private thoughts known. These thoughts are certainly revealing at times (though

⁴ It can be accepted that the truth he is referring to doesn't refer to universal truths but to local truths in specific situations.

not as revealing as in *Palestine*) but never display his personal conclusions about events. Although he is present, it seems as if he steps aside to let the story develop, allowing the readers to form their own assessments about the events of the Bosnian war.

4.5 History and truth

As discussed in 2.4.1.1, the relativity of history and truth is addressed in postmodernism and poststructuralism. *Šoba* is based on historical events of the Bosnian war between 1992-1995, as outlined in the beginning of this chapter. In the introduction to *Šoba* Sacco gives a summarised historical account of the events surrounding the Bosnian war. It is in the context of these events that Sacco goes to Bosnia and searches for a story to portray a more personalised history of the Bosnian war. In this way, he gives a personal face to “official” history.

Sacco tells the story of Šoba, an ordinary citizen who suffered the war and its consequences. In this way Sacco offers an alternative or parallel history to the one that was offered in mainstream newspapers and the television. Sacco (Sacco 2002) states that he tries to depict details that would otherwise be lost to mainstream press history. He uses the example of people cutting wood in Gorazde in the book *Safe area Gorazde* (figure 4.5). *Šoba* also features details that are not mainstream press material. For example, in figure 4.6 he shows the dogs that rummage the ruins of the war torn buildings, certainly not the kind of details that would likely be covered on the news. This detailed “deep context[ualisation]” (Easton 2005:3) creates an atmosphere of historic credibility, while providing an alternative to the mainstream press.

Šoba can be seen as an example of a “little narrative” (as described by Lyotard and discussed in 2.4.1.3). Little narratives emphasise local knowledge and experience as opposed to the all-explaining ‘universal knowledge’ of metanarratives. By telling the story of Šoba, Sacco acknowledges the possibility of the existence of different and equally valid little narratives about the war, of which *Šoba* is only one example. He does not attempt to generalise or reach conclusions about the war and how people should perceive it. Seen in the context of Lyotard’s work, perhaps a more appropriate term to describe *Šoba* would be as a “little history.”

Although Sacco acknowledges that he is subjective (Sacco 2002), he lays claim to his attempts at truthful representation. He does not seem to believe that subjectivity is an

obstacle to being truthful. It seems as if being truthful for Sacco means to be honest about his experiences and to report with integrity what he personally found to be the most important. As Easton summarises it: “he embraces his own subjectivity in the interest of finding – and sharing – the truth as he sees it and as it is shown to him” (Easton 2005:1). He acknowledges that “what interests [him] is more important than what is going on” (Sacco 2002). Sacco constantly refers to his attempts of portraying the “essential truth” (Sacco 2002) of a situation rather than representing it ‘objectively.’

Academically speaking, ‘essential truth’ is not a poststructuralist friendly term. In the bigger context of Sacco’s work and aims, it seems safe to assume that with “essential truth” he doesn’t mean the universally undisputable facts of what happened, but rather the closest possible version of what he considered to be the most important in his subjective opinion. In other words, his own truth.

Sacco creates a comic that, although based on historical events, does not attempt to create a factually correct version of events. He chooses to represent his personal truth by showing his experience of interacting with an individual that was affected by the Bosnian war.

4.6. Style

Style refers to “[t]he features of a book/painting, building [comic] etc. that make it typical of a particular author, artist, historical period etc” (*Oxford’s Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*...2004. Sv. ‘style’). Style can be described as one of the formal characteristics of a comic. In Sacco’s work there is a distinct juxtaposition between two stylistic conventions. He switches between realism and cartoony⁵ stylisation, or what Easton (2005:10) calls “realistic depiction and reflective abstraction.” His realistic treatment of subject matter is often confined to the background and inanimate subject matter, whereas his cartooniness is mostly applied to characters.

⁵ Cartooning or representing something in a cartoony way means to represent subject matter in an iconic way. In the case of comics, it would mean an iconic way of drawing. Cartooning and realism are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. The more simplified an image becomes, the more cartoony it becomes. Images are simplified and drawn iconically in order to amplify certain aspects of the image (McCloud 1993:29-31).

It appears as if Sacco uses realistic⁶ depiction of inanimate objects and backgrounds purposefully. He attempts to create a believable setting for his stories to unfold in. To this end, he uses a lot of realistic detail to give the reader an impression of what it would be like to be there. Sacco (2002) mentions this when he talks about his depiction of the town Gorazde in his book *Safe Area Gorazde*: "...it was very important to me to show Gorazde, the town—not 'town X' in Bosnia—but a very particular place, basically so that someone from the town would recognise it as his or her own." Furthermore, Sacco (Questions and answers...[sa]) states that

Comics can provide a great deal of visual information, which I think makes a place like Gorazde REAL in the reader's eye. And not just that place, but the people, because through the background detail one can see what they wore, how they chopped wood, the extent of the damage to their homes, etc.

Sacco pays similar close attention to detail in *Šoba*. For example, in figure 4.7 one can see the minute detail of the town and of the people carrying wood and cigarettes. Sacco says "...one of the effects of things about comics is you're dropping a reader right into the situation..." (Sacco 2002). When the reader opens the book, she is immediately submerged into an overwhelming, dense, visual world.

Sacco often uses his own photographic reference to create the context for his stories (Sacco 2002). He refrains from copying exactly from the photos, but extrapolates, changes viewpoints, constructs composite scenes and interprets his photographs. When he does not have access to photos, he often asks his subjects to draw images of their experiences, which he then incorporates (Sacco 2002).⁷ However, contrary to my expectation of dedicated comics artists, he does not often use a sketchbook to record visual information (Nevins 2002:22). Sacco spends most of his time writing notes during interviews with people, or recording interviews on audio, which he then later transcribes. The drawing only starts once he has left the location to start working on the book (Nevins 2002:24).

6 Of his realistic style in Palestine Sacco (Sacco 2002) notes the following: "If you look at the early pages of my Palestine work, I was very cartoony...and some people were pretty offended. And I thought about this and realised, you know, 'I have to step back from this.' I have to start drawing a little more realistically because I don't want this discourse I am trying to create to be drowned in...oh, it's just stereotype.' 'This guy has a big nose' kind of thing...Also, I felt like the topic itself deserved a more realistic treatment. I used cartooniness as a technique to emphasise certain things but I don't use it throughout."

7 Sacco tells of his experience gathering visual data for *Palestine*: "So I sat down with three guys in particular and said, 'Ok, I want you to draw me a map of this prison. Show me what it looked like.' And, so they described it to me. 'Two fences around the compound, barbed wire on top.' They described how the tents were, how the cots were laid out and how personal belongings would be tied up on the tents and things of this nature...So I much as possible I tried to recreate this" (Sacco 2002).

In contrast with his inanimate subject matter, Sacco's characters are often very stylised, expressive and cartoony (which can be seen in figure 4.8). "In comics I feel completely free to get cartoony when it's necessary to evoke an atmosphere..." (Sacco 2002). The cartoony stylisation and humour of these dancing figures successfully capture the mood of the scene. As the party gains momentum, the panel layout becomes more and more chaotic. His cartoony characters can also be seen as form of comic relief - it helps to lighten up the fairly serious subject matter of the book.

To execute his extremely controlled and meticulous technique, he uses a crow quill pen (Nevins 2002:25). He uses this to great effect in the very detailed textured surfaces he creates. At times his panels seem overworked, which sometimes results in a slight stiffness as can be seen in the foreground figure in figure 4.9.

Sacco's complex and detailed stylistic approach helps to contextualise his stories in a believable way. By juxtaposing realism and cartooniness he creates a visual tension between reality and the interpretation of reality as he sees it.

4.7 Characterisation

As mentioned in the list of terms, characterisation is the process of creating the illusion of a real person, referred to as a character, in a story. A character is created by traits that are alluded to through action, speech, external appearance as well as the environment that a character finds himself or herself in (Rimmon-Keenan 1983:61-66). Toolan adds that (1998:91) "the reader is a creative accomplice" in the creation of a character since these traits that the writer shows and describes "lead most readers to conceive of a *person* of whom these references and insights are just glimpses." Characterisation then is "the way that a writer makes characters in a book or play [or comic] seem real" (*Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary*...2004. Sv. 'characterization').

For me, one of the most successful aspects of Sacco's characterisation is his ability to display complexity. One technique he uses is to portray situations that show contradictions in the different characters' identities. By doing this he creates believable, three dimensional characters that cannot easily be labeled as merely good or bad. This contrasts with mainstream comics, which often rely on formulaic conventions to depict characters, resulting in one dimensional, uncomplicated characters.

The complexity of Sacco's characterisation can particularly be seen in *Šoba*. *Šoba* is portrayed as a womaniser, busy flirting or making suggestive comments about 'girls' (see figure 4.10 and 4.11). He is depicted as a popular ladies man and does not mind referring to himself as such. When Sacco, on the other hand, in passing refers to a 'cute' woman, he is reproached by *Šoba* who says that Bosnian women are not 'cute,' but unique and should be treated with respect (figure 4.12). Sacco carefully selects the situations in which the different sides of *Šoba* are revealed. In his flashbacks about the war *Šoba* often describes himself as being frightened, bewildered and vulnerable. At other times, in more causal interaction between him and Sacco, he is very macho about his experiences. He sometimes he reveals a deep respect for human life: "I still can't hate. I was educated in Tito's politics, brotherhood and unity, people must love each other" (Sacco 1998:35). Yet, in another situation he tells Sacco: "You should try to kill somebody sometime. It's like drinking beer" (Sacco 1998:9). These contradictory statements make the reader aware that *Šoba* is a fallible character, and that his version of events should be taken with a pinch of salt.

Sacco also characterises himself as a complex character, as Easton (2005:5) notes: "He sees himself alternately as journalist, voyeur, participant and media whore." In *Šoba* the different identities that he assigns to himself are not so easily noticed. In some of his other works, such as *Palestine* and *Safe area Gorazde* it seems clear that he is at times only interested in war action. At times he seems bored and disinterested and at other times he really seems to care deeply about the people he is involved with. By revealing his own inconsistencies, Sacco shows that he is just another human being participating in the story and not on the moral high ground.

Although constantly present, Sacco reveals little about himself and what he thinks about events. In fact, he often depicts himself as a naïve onlooker only tagging along with *Šoba*. To me it seems clear however, knowing his methods and the context of his previous works, that he is highly informed journalist, taking many personal risks to complete his projects. Anything but a naïve fly on the wall.

By displaying these contradictions in his characters and in himself, Sacco seems to suggest that readers should formulate their own conclusions about *Šoba* and the events in Bosnia. He does not simplify and popularise events and characters in order to present an easily acceptable version of events. Showing the complexity of the situation and the characters can also be seen as a reflection on the difficulty to understanding war and its effects.

The cartoony stylisation of his figures creates an intriguing contrast with his realistic settings. The cartooniness at times creates a sense of comic relief in the midst of the serious and weighty subject matter. Although cartoony, the people he depicts are never pretty, and often almost grotesque and ugly. This gives his work a coarse and almost unrefined edge, despite the fact that it is executed with great attention to detail and masterful draughtsmanship.

One of the pitfalls of working with dramatic human stories is that it easily becomes sentimental and romanticised for the sake of the readers. One of the ways in which Sacco side steps this pitfall is through his characterisation. With such complex and borderline ugly characters, it is almost impossible to consider *Šoba* to be 'romanticised' or 'sentimental.'

4.8 Text⁸

Sacco applies his text in a variety of inventive ways to reflect the content of the story. Firstly, he uses different textual conventions to distinguish between the speech of different characters, direct and indirect speech and past and present tense formulation. When the characters are using direct speech, the text appears in speech bubbles and is written in upper case (figure 4.5). When *Šoba* is having a flashback (figure 4.4), the text is written in upper and lower case, put in quotation marks and framed in a square box. When Sacco is sharing his personal thoughts, the text is written in upper and lower case in a square box but without the quotation marks (figure 4.8). Although these techniques seem fairly conventional, it contributes greatly to the clarity of the communication in *Šoba*.

Furthermore, Sacco uses the placement of the text to guide the viewers' eyes across the page (see figure 4.8). Since Sacco's pages are often visually very dense, the text path offers a helpful entry point into the overwhelming visuals. When first introduced to Sacco's work I found this technique quite jarring, but later realised that the pattern in which the text is arranged suggests a very natural path for the eye to follow.

Sacco also breaks the text apart for effect. When a situation becomes particularly energised, the text breaks up into many rectangular boxes, conceptually reflecting the

⁸ Text in this instance means "any form of written material" (*Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary*...2004. Sv. 'text') and not "an occasion for the interplay of multiple codes and perspectives" (Cullum-Swan, B & Manning 1994:463) as described in the list of terms.

atmosphere of the image. He cites the French writer, Ferdinand Celine as an important influence in this regard (Nevins 2002:20):

I was so impressed by his use of ellipses, and his cutting of these little phrases one by one, often saying exactly the same thing, maybe redundant but in his hands they just build up...there's this rhythm, they just build up into craziness...I remember thinking 'I would love to do something like that...' And that's when I started to break up my captions.

Sacco uses text not merely as a vessel for disseminating information but also as part of the conceptual communication of the comic.

4.9 Fragmentation of the narrative

As discussed in chapter three (3.4.7.2), the fragmentation of the narrative in literature is a distinctly postmodern characteristic. This fragmentation is reflected in alternative comics and can be seen in the narrative of *Šoba*. Smyth (1991) states that

the fragmentation and discontinuity of the contemporary experience of reality is deemed to be *reflected* in the plural and mobile structures of postmodern writing. Thus...epistemological and ontological doubt is conveyed through disjointed formal structures in a work of postmodern fiction.

In *Šoba*, there are two narratives that develop. One is the narrative of Sacco's research journey and the other is the story of Šoba's war experiences. Both these stories are represented in a fragmented and disjointed way. On page thirty two however, these two narratives catch up with one another and merge into one story.

It is almost impossible to determine whether or not the above mentioned narratives are related in chronological order. Both these stories are broken into a number of fragments and then presented in such a manner that they continually intercept with and interrupt each other. Each fragment functions as a little self contained narrative. It could be argued that, up to page thirty two, these fragments could have been arranged in many different (and maybe any) order and the narrative as a whole would still make sense. Transitions between these fragments are sudden and unexpected. In the one panel Šoba and Sacco would be at a party and in the next panel Šoba would be reliving his war experiences. These sudden transitions create a jarring effect and provoke a sense of displacement in the reader. The violence and mercilessness of the war situation is reflected in the way the comic tosses the reader between scenes with such different emotional content.

Page thirty two signifies a turning point in the comic. On this page the peace agreement is announced and Šoba is dismissed from the army. It is as if the past

catches up with the present and merges to become a single story. There are no more flashbacks to the war and there are only references to Šoba's present state of mind and his opinions of pressing issues pertaining to the end of the war. These thoughts, however, are also presented in a very fragmented way. There are sudden switches between Šoba talking randomly about what his going to do with his life and images that signify the effects of the war on society at large. In this case the fragmentation serves to illustrate his mixed feelings about the future and the lack of coherency and direction in his life.

4.10 Šoba, the reader and the creation of meaning

In chapter two (under 2.2.3), I discussed the creation of meaning as understood in a poststructuralist context. This understanding, namely that meaning is not embedded in a text but created in alliance with the reader, is reflected in recent methods of literary criticism such as reader response criticism. Reader response criticism tends to stress the role of the reader, in interaction with a text, in the creation of meaning. Although there are different approaches to reader response criticism, it generally "holds that the text largely determines the response, but suggests the text is full of gaps which the reader fills in" (Peck and Coyle 1993:188).

Comics intimately involve readers in the creation of meaning. Easton (2005:7) bases her argument on McCloud's *Understanding Comics*⁹ and mentions aspects that encourage reader involvement in comics. She states that "the gutter – the space between panels [force the reader to] drive the story forward temporally." In addition, comic artists additionally show (through images) and tell (through words). In this way, certain clues are given through text and other through images. This "allows the reader to engage his or her own mind in fleshing out characters, scenes and events" (2005:7). "[T]he iconic nature of images" makes it easy for the reader to identify with characters. The final aspect she mentions, and the one I will describe in more detail, is the phenomenon of closure.

According to McCloud (1993:63) closure is the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole...[and] mentally completing that which is incomplete based on past experience." Closure mainly occurs in the transition between panels in a comic. When the reader mentally links two comic panels placed in sequence, he or she commits closure.

⁹ *Understanding Comics* (1993) by Scott McCloud (1993) is commonly regarded as one of the most insightful books on the comics art form (Kannemeyer 1998:15).

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will only look at how closure contributes to reader participation and the creation of meaning in *Šoba* and not at the iconic nature of images or how the gutter contributes to the temporal progression of a comic. McCloud identifies six different types of panel transitions¹⁰ that require closure. I will look at two examples of transitions in *Šoba* that require closure, namely moment to moment transitions and scene to scene transitions. These seem to be the most often used depictions of closure in *Šoba*.

4.10.1 Moment to moment transitions in *Šoba*

According to McCloud (1993:63), a moment to moment transitions “requires very little closure.” There are many such examples in *Šoba*. In some cases Sacco completely omits panel borders to create a feeling of continuation and movement. The omission of panel borders can almost only be used in moment to moment transitions, when the time that elapses between moments is very little. A feeling of continuous motion is created by abandoning borders, and the scene plays out like a short animation (figure 4.13).

Another dramatic example of moment to moment transitions can be found on page 23. The bomb is depicted as it approaches and is placed against the static image of the market place. Because the space between the panels containing the bomb is big, the market place image fills most of the page. This creates an impression of freezing space and time, and evokes a mood of anxious anticipation. The approaching bomb is seen almost as if in slow motion, to dramatic effect. Yet, it is understood that it all takes place in a split second (figure 4.14).

When Sacco is in conversation with *Šoba* he often depicts moment to moment transitions. This creates a very dramatic effect in figure 4.15. By depicting *Šoba* directly from the front and subsequently zooming in closer on his face, the reader cannot avoid eye contact with *Šoba*. The reader is confronted by the uncomfortable eye contact, forced to listen to what *Šoba* has to say.

4.10.2 Scene to scene transitions

In scene to scene transitions the reader is transported “across significant distances of time and space” (McCloud 1993:71). In *Šoba* these transitions are generally used to

¹⁰ The six panel transitions that McCloud identifies are moment to moment, action to action, subject to subject, scene to scene and aspect to aspect transitions (McCloud 1994 70-72).

distinguish between a flashback and the present – it separates the fragments of the story (mentioned in 4.6) that constitute *Šoba*. These transitions are quite jarring as each scene places the reader in a completely different context. This is illustrated in the transition between page three and four (figures 4.16 and 4.17).

4.11 The limitations and potential of comics journalism

The time consuming nature of comics journalism is one of its primary disadvantages. Sacco states that it takes him on average three days to complete one page (Nevins 2001:27). Describing his working process, he says: "...you put a shackle on your ankle and you attach it to your desk, and you say, 'I am here for months...or years!'" (Nevins 2001:25). Cwiklik (Kannemeyer 1998:18) echoes this when saying: "[t]here is a certain amount of drudgework in any medium, but in no other medium is it so excessive or has such an intrusive effect on the creative process [than in comics]." Compared to the immediacy of photography, video and sound recordings or even writing a report, the process of producing a comic is certainly more time consuming.

The long and cumbersome process of producing a comic limits the scope of subject matter that can be addressed through comics journalism. Because of this, comics journalism cannot be used to announce news or to address topics that urgently require media attention and public awareness. By the time an artist created, published and distributed a comic, its content would no longer be relevant and other pressing issues would be at hand. In this way, comics journalism seems to be better suited to topics that lend themselves to retrospective reflection and in-depth investigation. For example, the assassination of a president cannot be brought to the public's attention through comics journalism. However, a comic journalist can produce a comic about the life of the president or the effects of the president's death on the country.

For Joe Sacco, it took three and a half years to produce *Safe Area Gorazde* after spending a month in Bosnia (Sacco 2002). However, not all comics journalism need to be as long as *Safe Area Gorazde*. Shorter comics can also be very effective. As mentioned in 3.3.3, Sacco, on assignment from *Details* magazine, covered the War Crime Tribunals in The Hague. This shorter piece was published in *Details*, to wide acclaim.

The *New Yorker*, under the artistic direction of Francoise Mouly and in collaboration with her husband Art Spiegelman, has pushed the idea of comics journalism in interesting directions. For this particular article (seen in figure 4.18-20), Spiegelman produced a comic about the groundbreaking work of comic artist Harvey Kurtzman.

This comic was done shortly after Kurtzman's death and served as an eulogy to the man and his work. This kind of approach has endless possibilities. A very interesting perspective could have been produced on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, through the eyes of a comic journalist. In spite of the lack of journalistic comics, there are some examples of historical comics in South Africa. This can be seen in the work of Conrad Botes (*Bloedrivier* 1995) and the recently published *Madiba Legacy Series*.¹¹

Another disadvantage of comics journalism is that it takes highly committed and skilled people who possess the ability to write, draw and hold an interest in journalistic subject matter. The textual journalist has to write well and the photographer has to take good photographs, but the comics journalist has to be both a good writer and a technically skilled artist. Furthermore, not all comic artists would make good comic journalists as few of them are interested in applying comics to journalism. Sacco notes the following on the difficulty of comics journalism (Nevins 2001:41):

You know the thing about this medium is that it takes a very singular individual to do it –someone who is really going to put the time in, and is probably going to start at a fairly early stage. And its' a lot more work than being a guitar player or writing a book...Spiegelman said you're basically penalized because you have two talents.

Nevins reacts on Sacco's comment by saying:

Two talents – you can write and you can draw. Where if you had only one talent, you'd know exactly which way to go...and you'd get a lot more respect immediately, because you'd be 'a struggling young novelist' or a 'struggling young illustrator.'

When it comes to immediacy, topicality and speed, comics journalism cannot compete with the mainstream media machine in the form of the press, television and the internet. It can, however, add dimension and variety to in-depth forms of journalism such as investigative journalism, documentaries, human interest stories or journalistic essays. A piece of comics journalism can be published instead of – or in addition to – a written opinion or analysis page in a newspaper or magazine.

11 The *Madiba Legacy Series* is an example of an historical comic in the South African context. The life of Nelson Mandela is serialised in nine sections and was launched on Friday the 28th of October 2005 (Sibeko 2005). A million comics were printed. However, I find it difficult to believe in the artistic credibility of the comic. The project is sponsored by Anglo American, which speaks of possible business and political agendas as well as restrictions that the artists had to operate within. Although well researched, the story in my opinion is fairly one dimensional. Despite my reservations, I do think that it is a positive step in the direction of public acceptance for the possibilities of comics journalism in South Africa.

The final disadvantage of comics journalism (and comics in general) is the uphill battle it has to fight for cultural acceptance as a serious art form. To work in the area of comics journalism, is to run the risk of not being taken seriously by the largest part of the population. People generally still harbour several misconceptions about comics as an art form and many still regard comics as a juvenile art form of inferior literary quality, unable to address serious subject matter. Eisner (2000:3) summarises this dilemma by noting that "...comics still struggle for acceptance, and the art form, after more than ninety years of popular use, is still regarded as a problematic literary vehicle."

I concur with Easton (2005:13), voicing her unbelief about the reluctance of people to accept comics journalism as a credible form of art and journalism:

I find it somewhat incongruous that...comics, a medium born in the newspapers of the nineteenth century and deployed in the interest of providing greater detail and context for news, would at the turn of *this* century have to fight an uphill battle to gain respect of journalists, critics and readers alike. It took Sacco many years for his work to gain mainstream acceptance...and even today after garnering industry respect for his substantial work, many potential readers still need to be convinced.

4.12 Conclusion

Šoba is a complex artwork that can be approached from infinite angles. In the above reflection I offer one possible approach to viewing *Šoba*. This was done by discussing *Šoba* according to various characteristics that constitute its identity. The discussions on poststructuralism, narrative studies, journalism and comics in the previous two chapters, provided the background for my reflection on *Šoba*.

In this chapter I started out by reflecting on self reflexivity in *Šoba* and pointed out that Sacco's inclusion as a character is in itself an element of self reflexivity. I illustrated how Sacco, with self awareness, reflects on the process of creating the comic. Secondly, I explored subjectivity in *Šoba* and tried to prove that Sacco's subjectivity is not an intrusive and self centred subjectivity but rather a 'mature subjectivity.' Lastly I reflected on the relationship between history and truth in *Šoba*. This reflection showed that Sacco, although admittedly subjective, still pursues a truthful representation.

My subsequent reflection on style, characterisation and text sheds some light on the formal aspects of *Šoba*. I tried to show how Sacco uses formal aspects to enhance the content of *Šoba*. I argued that the fragmentation of the narrative effectively reflects the violence and horror of the war in Bosnia. Lastly, by investigating closure and panel transitions in *Šoba*, I looked at one way of how meaning is created in *Šoba*.

I concluded with a reflection on the limitations and potential of comics journalism as an art form. Because of the amount of time it takes to produce a comic, the subject matter of comics journalism is limited to themes that can be reflected on in retrospect. Another limitation is that only very particular individuals are suited for the demands of comics journalism. Therefore, it is difficult to find good comics journalists. Misconceptions about comics in general negatively influence the art form's public image, which limits its popular acceptance.

Šoba can be simultaneously considered as a narrative, a comic, a piece of journalism an example of postmodern literature. By pursuing truth, manipulating the narrative in inventive ways and employing complex characterisation, Sacco manages to reflect the complexities of an individual living in the shadow of the horrors of war. The comics journalism art form has its limitations and is not perfectly suited for all kinds of subject matter. When applied within its constraints, however, it can be highly original and provocative.

4.13 Illustrations: Addendum to chapter four



Figure 4.1 Palestine (Sacco 2003:131)



Figure 4.2 Šoba (Sacco 1998:12)



Figure 4.3 Šoba (Sacco 1998:3)



Figure 4.4 Šoba (Sacco 1998:27)



Figure 4.5 Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95 (Sacco 2003:67)



Figure 4.6 Šoba (Sacco 1998:38)



Figure 4.7 Šoba (Sacco 1998:27)



Figure 4.8 Šoba (Sacco 1998:21)



Figure 4.9 Šoba (Sacco 1998:29)



Figure 4.10 Šoba (Sacco 1998:9)



Figure 4.11 Šoba (Sacco 1998:17)

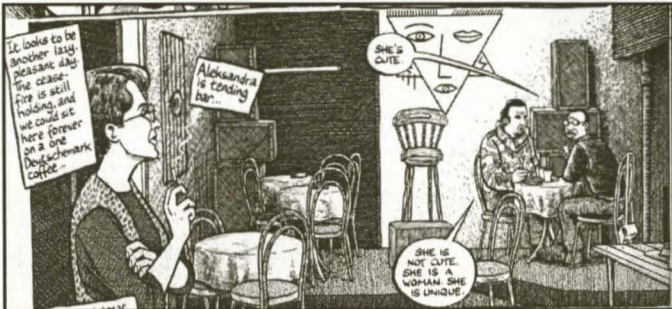


Figure 4.12 Šoba (Sacco 1998:26)



Figure 4.13 Šoba (Sacco 1998:20)

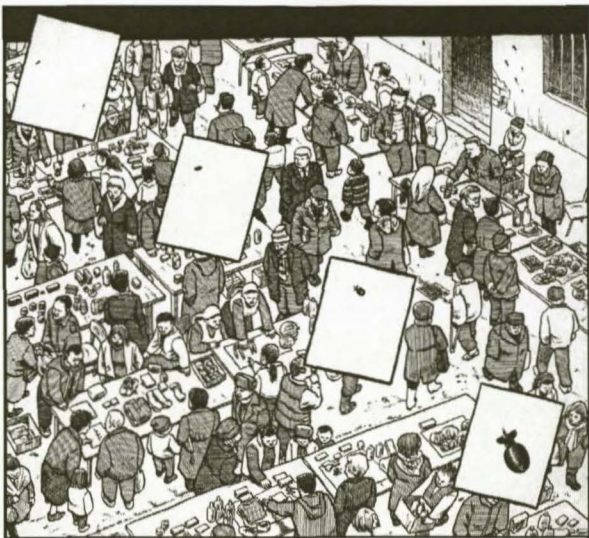


Figure 4.14 Šoba (Sacco 1998:23)

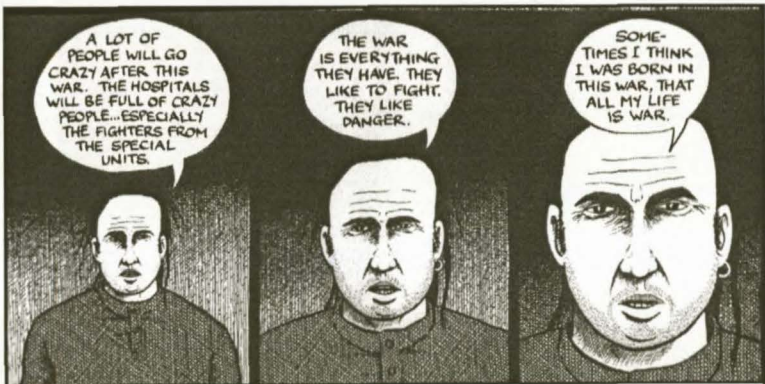


Figure 4.15 Šoba (Sacco 1998:10)



Figure 4.16 Šoba (Sacco 1998:3)



Figure 4.17 Šoba (Sacco 1998:3)



Figure 4.18 A furshlugginer genius! (Spiegelman 1993:21). As published in *The New Yorker*. June 28



Figure 4.19 A furshlugginer genius! (Spiegelman 1993:22) As published in *The New Yorker*. June 28



Figure 4.20 A furshlugginer genius! (Spiegelman 1993:23) as published in *The New Yorker*. June 28

Chapter five: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This study has led to several personal and academic discoveries, as well as the identification of many advantages and limitations to its approach. As a small and modest academic study it only briefly summarised the complexity of the topics addressed.

5.2 Summary of the study

In my introduction to this study I stated that my aspiration to study *Šoba* arose from a personal interest in comics journalism that developed during the course of my studies. I became intrigued by narratives when I realised their important role in the construction of reality and meaning. In this study I combined my interest in narratives and comics by discussing *Šoba* as an example of narrative in comics journalism.

I approached this thesis from a social constructionist perspective which holds that language, narratives and relationships shape our perceptions of reality and meaning. Furthermore, I took the position that *Šoba* is firstly an example of a narrative and secondly an example of comics journalism. I organised my thesis according to this supposition, moving from the broad vantage point of narrative studies, towards a narrower consideration of comics, journalism and comics journalism. These considerations culminated in a detailed discussion of *Šoba*, seen in the context of social construction poststructuralism and narrative studies. Consequently, I worked from a broad to a focussed perspective.

In chapter two I elaborated on the conceptual approach of my thesis, which is based on poststructuralism and narrative studies. I explained the supposition in poststructuralism that narratives shape our realities and world views and explored the historical and philosophical background of narrative. The perceptions and studies of narratives changed with the shift from a structuralist to a poststructuralist understanding. This exploration highlighted the relevance of narrative studies in general and its specific relevance to *Šoba*.

In chapter three I explored comics journalism and its relation to *Šoba*. I explored the historical development of comics and journalism and their combination in comics journalism as exemplified by *Šoba*. I argued that poststructuralism had a significant effect on and changed perceptions of the narrative art forms of comics and

journalism. These changing perceptions facilitated the harmonious merging of journalism and comics as comics journalism. I also reflected on the history of textual journalism and its traditions, and the influence of these traditions on *Šoba*. I subsequently reflected on the history and development of visual journalism and comics. The exploration of journalism and comics illustrated how poststructuralism influenced these narrative art forms, and how they were changed to accommodate one another, resulting in their eventual fusion.

In chapter four I combined the concepts discussed in the preceding chapters, such as subjectivity and self reflexivity, and added the concept of style to reflect on *Šoba*. The discussion of these concepts enriched the assessment of comics journalism and *Šoba* in particular. I positioned *Šoba* in the context of the Bosnian war and applied these concepts to the reflection of *Šoba*. Instead of a clinical and technical analysis I attempted to create a fluid reflection. It is from this that I concluded that comic journalism, as applied by Sacco in *Šoba*, is potentially a provoking and important form of journalism, considered in a poststructuralist context. I concluded by addressing some of the limitations of comics journalism and speculating about the possibilities of its application.

In this study I presented a meaningful and detailed context against which a reader should be able to better understand and appreciate *Šoba*. I reflected on the historical and philosophical aspects of narratives in general and comics journalism in particular, and offered an approach for understanding the rich heritage of comics journalism. This illustrates the difficulty in trying to disregard comics journalism as an inappropriate art form with which to present serious subject matter. Furthermore, I deconstructed traditional assessments of narratives, comics, journalism and comics journalism and reconstructed more meaningful understandings of these concepts. For example, I illustrated the inherent complexity of the subject matter that Sacco deals with in *Šoba*, by addressing the complicated nature of terms such as truth and history which are differently understood by structuralists and poststructuralists. By contextualising *Šoba* in this way, I drew attention to the potential of comics journalism as a narrative art form, seen in a poststructuralist context.

5.3 Contributions and limitations of the study

This study has argued that comics journalism has a rich history, better understood when situated within the poststructuralist paradigm. Comics journalism is a versatile art form, well suited to address serious and topical issues. Furthermore, this study

adds to the limited number of studies focussing on comics journalism, and serves to stimulate interest in this art form and its possible applications. This study also contributes to the study of Joe Sacco's work, in particular by focussing on *Šoba*, a work which is seldom focussed on¹.

For me personally, this study has contributed to my understanding of the history of comics journalism. I assumed that Sacco's approach was completely novel and had appeared out of nowhere. My exploration into the illustrated journals and war art, made me realise that there is a history of frontline illustrators, and that Sacco's work can be seen as an extension of this tradition. By relating his work to historical examples of similar work and properly contextualising his work, a sceptical audience may arrive at a better appreciation.

As a result of the limited scope of this study, the tradition of comics journalism in other cultures was excluded. I focussed on one specific comic artist in an American context, and excluded artists in different contexts and cultures who are possibly involved with related work. For example, in Japan, comics is a thriving art form and examples of historical and biographical comics is abundant. In Europe, particularly France, Belgium and the Netherlands, comics is very popular and examples of comics journalism can be found. Although these contexts weren't addressed, I consider them valid areas of study.

Another area I did not investigate is web comics (comics published exclusively on the internet) and their relation to comics journalism. This study is limited to a very specific cultural context, and can be expanded on by further explorations into comics journalism in other cultural contexts and on the internet.

Furthermore, I focussed only on the influence of poststructuralism on the development of comics journalism. There are many other possible factors that influenced the merging of the art forms of comics and journalism that I did not address, and which could be explored in further studies. Also, I only briefly discussed the various applications of comics journalism and did not elaborate on the possible application of comics journalism to the South African context. The possible

¹ I found a lot of written material about Sacco, *Palestine* and *Safe Area Gorazde*. However, I found only passing references to *Šoba* and certainly no in depth studies. In that sense, this study is a novel contribution.

applications of comics journalism in South Africa is another opportunity for further research.

Most importantly, my reflection cannot do justice to the work of Sacco. It must be read and one's own meanings must be constructed for its true value to be appreciated.

5.4 Concluding remarks

Narratives and the study of narratives are vital to the understanding of ourselves and of our world. Through the subversive and undervalued art form of comics journalism, narratives such as *Šoba* influence our understanding of historical and topical events. Joe Sacco, by packaging serious and historically relevant material in this art form, challenges the general understanding of journalism, comics, truth and history. In doing so, he reflects on the questions raised in a poststructuralist paradigm.

Comics journalism as an art form, is a hybrid crossing between text and image and should be appreciated for its complexity, instead of being frowned on as juvenile entertainment. Sacco applies comics journalism with masterful skill, and succeeds in portraying the intricacy of contemporary news; the paradoxical relationships between reality and invention, objectivity and subjectivity; verifiable facts and personal experience, social responsibility and commercial requirements.

Through *Šoba*, Sacco reflectively contributes a small personalised or local narrative to existing versions of the Bosnian war. The contribution of *Šoba* by no means lessens the necessity for the immediacy and often impersonal approach of mainstream press journalism. However, there should be more room and demand for deeply involved and contextualised approaches like Sacco's, be it in the form of comics journalism or not.

As I have learnt, and believe that other journalists and comic artists can also learn, Sacco's dedication to his subject matter revealed his subjectivity, vulnerability and sense of social responsibility. These aspects, combined with Sacco's draughtsmanship and attention to detail, demonstrates that comics journalism is a highly underestimated medium that can positively contribute to our understanding of history and news in a poststructuralist world. However, as noted in 4.11, comics journalism is far from being popularly recognised or encouraged as a form of journalism. The struggle for the recognition of comics as a serious art form, able to

address relevant and topical subject matter, has only begun and continues beyond the end of this thesis.

Bibliography

Alvermann, D. [Sa]. *Narrative inquiry: from past to present*. [Online]. Available <http://www.readingonline.org/articles/handbook/alvermann/> [2005, Jan. 19].

Appignanesi, R & Garrat, C. 1999. *Introducing postmodernism*. Cambridge: Icon Books.

Arisman, M & Heller, J. (eds.) 2002. *The education of an illustrator*. New York: Allworth Press.

Atkinson, R. 1998. *The life story interview*. Sage University Papers Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Vol 44. California: Sage: 1-40.

Bal, M. 1994. *On meaning making: essays in semiotics*. California: Poloridge Press.

Bal, M. 1999. *Narratology: An introduction to the theory of narrative*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press.

Barker, M. 1989. *Comics, ideology, power and the critics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Barthes, R. 1977. First Edition. *Image – music – text*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Belsey, A. & Chadwick, R. (eds.) 1992. *Ethical issues in journalism and the media*. New York: Routledge.

Birns, N. 2001. Postmodernism. In Taylor, V and Winqvist, C (eds.) *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge: 85-86.

Botes, C. 1995. Bloedrivier. In *Bitterkomix* 5: 18-30.

Boynton, R. [Sa]. *The new new journalism*. 2005. Online excerpt from the book. Random House [Online]. Available <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4750680> [2005, Sept.6].

- Brogan, W. 1989. *Plato's pharmakon: in between repetitions*. In Silverman, H (ed.) *Derrida and deconstruction*. London: Routledge: 7-23.
- Burger, K. 2003a. Stories oppad na heelwording. *Beeld, PLUS*. 29 April: 3.
- Burger, W. 2003b. Oor die gewildheid van lewensverhale. *Beeld, PLUS*. 1 March: 4.
- Burr, V. 1998. *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Campbell, D. 2003. 'I do comics, not graphic novels.' *The Guardian*, October: 23. [Online].
Available <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,1068677,00.html> [2005, April 6].
- Canning, P. 2001. Subjectivity. In Taylor, V. and Winkquist, C. (eds.) *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge: 381-383.
- Carrier, D. 2000. *The aesthetics of comics*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Carruthers, J. 1992. Introduction. In Greenwall, R. *Artists and illustrators of the Anglo-Boer War*. Cape Town: Fernwood Press: 11-16.
- Chambers, R. 1984. *Story and situation: narrative seduction and the power of fiction*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chandler, D. 1995. *Texts and the construction of meaning*. [Online]. Available <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documants/short/texts.html> [2005. Nov.16].
- Chung, P. 1998. *The state of the visual narrative in film and comics*. [Online]. Available http://www.mag.awn.com/index.php3//type=all&sort=date&article_no=444 [2003, May 13].
- Clandinin, D.J. and Connelly, F.M. 2000. *Narrative inquiry: experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Clark, T. 2001. Todorov, Tzvetan. In Taylor, V and Winkquist, C (eds.) *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge: 401-402.

Coste, D. 1989. *Narrative as communication*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press

Culhane, T.H. & Kerr, S. [Sa]. *The humble comic*. Unpublished Research Paper.

[Online].

Available http://www.pearsonlearnig.com/correlation/rsp/researchpaper_comic.pdf

[2001, Sept. 19].

Culler, J. 1994. *On deconstruction: theory and criticism after structuralism*. London: Routledge.

Cullum-Swan, B & Manning, P. 1994. Narrative content and semiotic analysis. In *Handbook of qualitative research* by Denzin, K & Lincoln, Y (eds.) London: Sage.

Currie, M. 1998. *Postmodern narrative theory*. New York: St Martin's Press.

De George, R.T. & De George F.M (eds.) 1972. *The structuralists from Marx to Levi Strauss*. New York: Anchor Books.

Delahunt, M. [Sa]. *Narrative art*. [Online]. Available <http://www.artnet.com/library> [2003, April 13].

Denzin, K & Lincoln, Y (eds.) 1994. *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Dixon, J. 1995. Community stories and indicators for evaluating community development. *Community development journal* 30 (4).

Dobson, S & Juschka D. 2001. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. In Taylor, V and Winqvist, C (eds.) *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge: 216-217.

Docherty, T (ed.) 1993. *Postmodernism: a reader*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Documentary studies, journalism and non-fiction. [Sa]. [Online]. Available <http://web.lemoyne.edu/~hevern/nr-journal.html> [2005, April 6].

Easton, J. 2003. *Comics and journalism: truth and subjectivity on the work of Joe Sacco*. Unpublished preliminary draft for presentation in Comparative Media Studies at

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA [Online]. Available <http://web.mit.edu/joellen/www/public/writing/801.1.htm> [2005, Aug. 16].

Easton, J. 2005. *Comics and journalism: truth and subjectivity on the work of Joe Sacco*. Unpublished final draft for presentation in Comparative Media Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA. Personal correspondence.

Edgar, A. 1992. Objectivity, bias, truth. In Belsey, A. & Chadwick R. (eds.) *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media*. New York: Routledge: 112-129.

Eisner, W. 1985. *Comics and sequential art*. Florida: Poorhouse Press.

Eisner, W. 2000. *Graphic storytelling*. Florida: Poorhouse Press.

Epston, D & White, M. 1990. *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Ettema, J & Glasser, T. 1998. *Custodians of conscience: investigative journalism and public virtue*. New York: Columbia University Press.

French structuralism. [Sa]. [Online].

Available

http://www.emuseum.mnsu.edu/cultural/anthropology/french_structuralism.html [2003, May 14].

Gergen, K. 2001. *Social construction in context*. London: Sage Publications.

Gergen, K. [Sa] *Writing as relationship*. [Online]. Available

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/kgergen1/web/page.phtml> [2005, Oct. 6].

Gieber, D. [Sa]. *Comics book history, Fascinating!* [Online]. Available

http://www.articlecity.com/articles/hobbies/article_111.shtml [2005, Oct. 6].

Glubok, S. 1979. *The art of the comic strip*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.

Gordon, I. 1998. *Comics and consumer culture 1890-1945*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Gorny, E. [Sa]. *What is semiotics?* [Online]. Available
<http://www.zhurnal.ru/staff/gorny/english.htm> [2003, May 14].

Greenwall, R. 1992. *Artists and illustrators of the Anglo-Boer War*. Cape Town: Fernwood Press.

Groth, G. 2001. *Joe Sacco, frontline journalist: why Sacco went to Gorazde*. [Online]. Available http://www.tcj.com/aa02ws/i_sacco.html [2005, April 6].

Harland, R. 1987. *Superstructuralism: the philosophy of structuralism and poststructuralism*. New York: Methuen.

Harrington, W. 1997. *Intimate journalism: The art and craft of reporting everyday life*. California: Sage Publications.

Harris, C. & Lester P. (eds.) 2002. *Visual journalism: a guide for new media professionals*. Massachusettes: Allyn and Bacon.

Hopkins, J. [Sa]. *The John Hopkins guide to literary theory and criticism*. [Online]. Available http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/structuralism.html [2003, May 12].

Horn, M. (ed.) 1976. *The world encyclopedia of comics*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

Howells, C. 1998. *Derrida: deconstruction from phenomenology to ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Inductive and deductive reasoning. [Sa]. [Online]. Available
<http://www2.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/induc/ind-ded.html> [2005, Nov. 23].

Jameson, F. 1993. Postmodernism, or the culture of late capitalism. In Docherty, T (ed.) *Postmodernism: a reader*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf: 62-92.

Joe Sacco. [Sa]. [Online]. Available
http://www.fantagraphics.com/artist/sacco/sacco_bio.html [2005, April 6].

Josselson, R. & Lieblich, A. (eds.) 1995. *Interpreting experience: the narrative study of lives*. California: Sage Publications.

Journalism. [Sa]. [Online] Available <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journalism> [26 Nov. 2005].

Kannenbergh, G. [Sa]. *Form, function, fiction: text and image in the comics narratives of Winsor McCay, Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware*. Abstract of PhD. [Online]. Available <http://gatpr.dt.uh.edu/~kannenbg/fff.html> [2005, Nov 16].

Kannemeyer, A. 1998. Die stripmedium: 'n homogene kunsvorm. *Image and Text: A Journal for Design*. 8:15-19.

Kaul, A. (ed.) 1997. American journalists, 1945-1995 First series. *Dictionary of literary biography*: Vol 185: xv-xvii, 334-342.

Kramer, M. [Sa]. *Literary journalism*. Excerpt from the forward. [Online]. Available <http://www.bu.edu/mkramer/litjourn.html> [2005, Sept. 6].

Kunzle, D. 1973. *The early comic strip: narratives strips and picture stories in the European broadsheet from c.1450 to 1825*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lalumière, C. [Sa]. *A short history of American comic books*. [Online]. Available <http://www.januarymagazine.com/features/comix.html> [2005, Oct. 4].

Lebeck, R. & Von Dewitz, B. (ed.) 2001. *A history of photojournalism. 1839-1973*. Bonn: Steidl.

Lee, A. 1990. *Realism and power: postmodern British fiction*. London: Routledge.

Lent, J. A (ed.) 1999. *Pulp demons: international dimensions of the postwar anti-comics campaign*. London: Associated University Press.

Lester, P. 2002. Visual journalism: past, present and future. In Harris, C. & Lester P. (eds.) *Visual journalism: a guide for new media professionals*. Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.

Leventhal, R. [Sa]. *Working through the trauma of the Holocaust*. [Online]. Available <http://www.jefferson.village.virginia.edu/holocaust/spiegelman.html> [2004, Jan.7].

Linney, B. 1995. *Pictures, people and power*. London: Macmillan Education.

Literary journalism. [Sa]. [Online]. Available [Creativenonfiction://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_journalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_journalism)) [2005, 26 Nov].

Margaroni, M. 2001. Derrida, Jacques. In Taylor, V and Winkquist, C (eds.) *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge: 92-93.

Martin, W. 1986. *Recent theories of narratives*. New York: Cornell University press.

McCloud, S. 1994. *Understanding comics*. New York: Harper Collins.

McDonald, H. The narrative act: Wittgenstein and narratology. [Online]. Available <http://www.pum.unmontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol14/mcdonald.html> [2004, Sept. 26].

Miraldi, R. 1990. *Muckraking and objectivity: journalism's colliding traditions*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Narrative art. [Sa]. [Online]. Available <http://www.artlex.com/Artlex/n/narrative.html> [2003, May 13].

Nevins, M. 2002. "Drawing from life": an interview with Joe Sacco. *International journal of comic art* 4(2): 1-52.

New, J. 2001. *Dan Eldon: the art of life*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books

New criticism/formalism. 2005. [Online]. Available <http://www.assumption.edu/users/adv/HHGateway/Gateway/Approaches.html> [2005, July 26].

Newton, J.H. 2001. *The burden of visual truth*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Nieman conference on narrative journalism. 2002. [Online].
Available <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/events/conferences/narrative/index.html>
[2005, April 6].

Niewoudt, S. 2003. Gewone mense se stories nodig. *Beeld PLUS*. 20 February: 12.

Nolan, A. 1986. *Jesus before Christianity*. Cape Town: Credo Press.

Nyberg, A. 1998. *Seal of approval: the history of the comics code*. Mississippi: University of Mississippi.

Lent, J.A. (ed.) 1999. *Pulp demons: international dimensions of the postwar anti-comics campaign*. London: Associated University Press.

Odoi, F. & Packalen, L. 2000. *Comics with an attitude*. Helsinki: Department of International Development Corporation.

Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English. 2004. Sv. 'characterization, non fiction, photojournalism, realism, science, style, stylize, text'. Sixth edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pal, H. *The future of narratology*. [Sa]. An introduction to Ph.D. research. [Online].
Available <http://members.home.nl/harald.pol/dissertation.htm> [2005, June 6].

Palmer, D. 1997. *Structuralism and poststructuralism for beginners*. USA: Writers and Readers Publishing.

Peck, J. & Coyle, M. 1993. Second edition. *Literary terms and criticism*. London: Macmillan Press.

Pettit, P. 1975. *The Concept of structuralism: a critical analysis*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Limited.

Pheloung, G. 'Just like old times': Frederick Bartheleme and the aesthetics of postmodernism. *Critique* 40(2):172-181. [Online]. Available
<http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=1423861> [2005, Oct. 4].

Prince, G. 1982. *Narratology: the form and function of narrative*. New York: Mouton publishers.

Questions and answers with Safe Area Gorazde author JOE SACCO. [Sa]. [Online]. Available http://www.fantagraphics.com/artist/sacco/sacco_qa.html [2005, April 6].

Reuters. 2005. Yahoo may be redefining journalism: search for news will include blogs. *Cape Times*. 5 October: 9.

Reynolds, R. 1992. *Superheroes*. London: Batsford.

Richardson, L. 1994. Writing: a method of inquiry. In Denzin, K & Lincoln, Y (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage: 516-527.

Riessman, K. 1993. *Narrative analysis*. California: Sage Publications.

Rimmon-Kenan, S. 1983. *Narrative fiction: contemporary poetics*. London: Methuen.

Roman, D. 2001. Poststructuralism. In Taylor, V and Winkler, C (eds.) *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge: 308-310.

Rorty, R. 1993. Postmodernist bourgeois liberalism. In Docherty, T (ed.) *Postmodernism: a reader*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf: 323-328.

Ryan, M. L. *On defining narrative media*. [Sa]. [Online]. Available <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/mediumtheory/marielauryan.htm> [2003, May 13].

Sabin, R. 1993. *Adult comics: an introduction*. London: Routledge.

Sabin, R. 1996. *Comics, comix & graphic novels: a history of comic art*. London: Phaidon Press.

Sabin, R. & Teal, T. (eds.) 2003. *Below critical radar: fanzines and alternative comics from 1976 to now*. United Kingdom: Slab-O-Concrete.

Sacco, J. 2002. *Joe Sacco*. Transcript of Joe Sacco's presentation at the 2002 conference on comics and graphic novels at the University of Florida. [Online].

Available <http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/volume1/issue1/sacco/> [2005, April 6].

Sacco, J. 2003. *Palestine*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Sacco, J. 2003. *Safe area Gorazde: the war in eastern Bosnia 1992-95*. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books.

Sacco, J. 1998. *Šoba*. Quebec: Drawn and quarterly.

Sacco, J. 2005. *War's end: profiles from Bosnia 1995-1996*. Quebec: Drawn & Quarterly.

Sardar, Z. 2000. Deconstructing postmodernism. *Free Arab Voice*. 13 February. [Online]. Available <http://www.freearabvoice.org/MatrixOfPostmodernismAndGlobalization.htm> [2005 Oct. 7].

Sarup, M. 1993. *An introductory guide to post-structuralism and post modernism*. Second edition. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Saven-Baden, M. 2004. Achieving reflexivity: moving researchers from analysis to interpretation in collaborative inquiry. *Journal of Social Work Practice* 18(3): 365-378.

Scheub, H. 1998. *Story*. England: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Shamoon, D. 2003. Focalization and narrative voice in the novels and comics of Uchida Shungiku. *International journal of comic art* 5(1): 47-160.

Schwandt, T. 1994. Constructivist and interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In Denzin, K & Lincoln, Y (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Sibeko, S. 2005. *Yahoo! UK & Ireland* news. [Online]. Available <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/28102005/325/photo/nelson-mandela-smiles-launch-madiba-legacy-series-nine-part-series.html> [2005, Nov. 13].

Silverman, H. (ed.) 1989. *Derrida and deconstruction*. London: Routledge.

Sim, S. (ed.) 1999. *The icon critical dictionary of postmodern thought*. Cambridge: Icon Books.

Skordili, B. 2001. Little narrative. In Taylor, V and Winqvist, C (eds.) *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge.

Smith, M. [Sa]. *Postmodern influences on modern American news conventions*. [Online]. Available <http://journalism.nyu.edu/faculty/files/stephens-postmodern.pdf> [2005, Sept. 6].

Smyth, E. (ed.) 1991. *Postmodernism and contemporary fiction*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.

Spiegelman, A. 1993. A furshlugginer genius! *The New Yorker*. June 28:22.

Stam, J. [Sa]. *Introduction: Social sonstruction and its critics*. [Online]. Available http://www.ucalgary.ca/~stam/pdf/SC_and_Critics.pdf [2005, Jan. 17].

Stevenson, R. 1991. Postmodernism and contemporary fiction in Britain. In Smyth, E. (ed.). *Postmodernism and contemporary fiction*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.

Taylor, V. and Winqvist, C. (eds.) 2001. *An encyclopedia of postmodernism*. London: Routledge.

They drew fire: The combat artists of World War 2. [Sa]. [Online]. Available <http://www.pbs.org/theydrewfire/index.html> [2005, Aug.18].

Toolan, M. 2001. *Narrative: a critical linguistic introduction*. Second edition. London: Routledge.

Veen, G. 2002. Digital images and the new visual literacy. In Harris, C. & Lester, P. (eds.) *Visual journalism: a guide for new media professionals*. Massachusettes: Allyn and Bacon.

Wepman, D. 1990. Spiegelman, Art. In Goulart, R (ed.) 1990. *The encyclopedia of American comics*. New York: Facts on File:343

What is social constructionism? [Sa]. [Online]. Available
http://www.psy.dmu.ac.uk/michael/soc_con_disc.htm [2005, Nov.16].

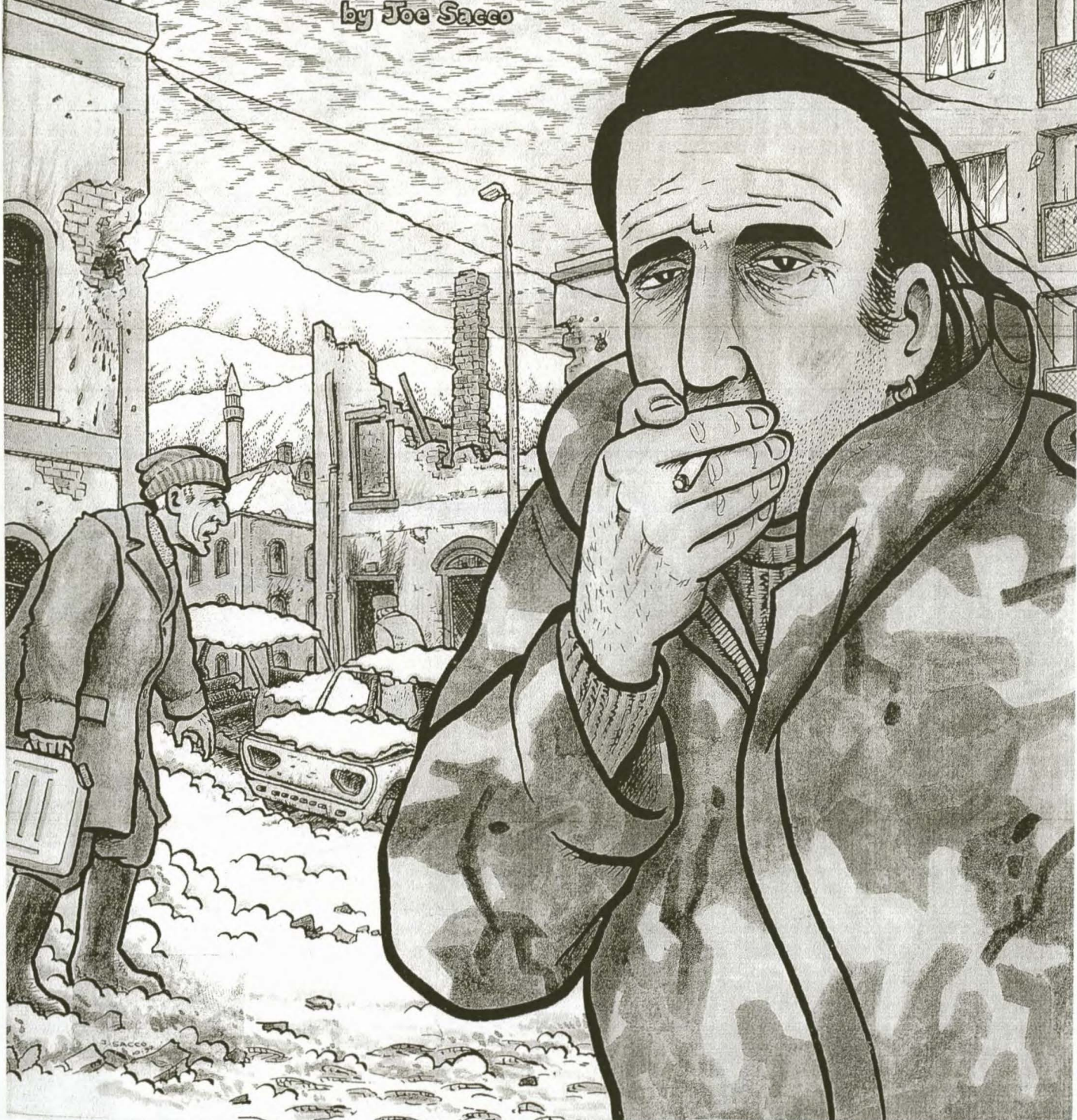
STORIES FROM BOSNIA №1

Drawn
and
Quarterly

\$OBA

\$3.95 U.S.
\$4.95 CAN.

by Joe Sacco



INTRODUCTION

The three principals in the 1992-95 Bosnian war were the Bosnian Croats, the Bosnian Serbs, and those Bosnians—Muslims, Serbs, and Croats—who supported the internationally recognized Bosnian government, which has often been described as Muslim-dominated (Bosnians, Muslims, Serbs, and Croats are all south Slavs speaking the same language. Their primary distinguishing characteristic is religion: Serbs are Orthodox Christian; Croats are Roman Catholic).

In the late 1980s, Bosnians had to decide between remaining in the disintegrating Yugoslav state, which was dominated by an increasingly chauvinistic Serbia and its manipulative president, Slobodan Milošević, and seeking independence. Bosnian Serbs, who had been among the ethnic majority in the former Yugoslavia, would have found themselves in the minority in an independent Bosnia. Fears of Muslim domination (Muslims made up 46 percent of Bosnia's population, Serbs 31 percent) were stoked by Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, who argued for an ethnic partition of Bosnia. The Bosnian Serbs declared autonomous areas and convened their own parliament. Meanwhile, in April 1992, Bosnia was recognized as an independent state by the European Community. The Bosnian government chose to resist the division of Bosnia, arguing that Serbs, Croats, and Muslims could continue to live together as they had under Tito, the wartime Partisan leader and father of modern Yugoslavia, and that, in any case, the ethnic groups were too mixed to make partition feasible.

But the Bosnian Serbs formed their own break-away state, Republika Srpska, which began to systematically rid itself of most non-Serbs, Muslims and Croats, in areas it controlled and areas it conquered with the heavy weapons left to it by the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav national army and with the help of notorious paramilitary groups from Serbia.

JOE SACCO

The Bosnian Serbs laid siege to Sarajevo, the capital city and seat of the Bosnian government, in the spring of 1992. The siege was still in place when the war ended in November 1995 following a series of battlefield reverses for the Bosnian Serbs and the decisive intervention of NATO against them.

THIS SERIES

I arrived in Sarajevo in late September 1995 and stayed in Bosnia for a little more than four months. I found accommodation with an older woman who had had an encyclopedia set and other large volumes stacked up against the sliding door that opened on the balcony that looked out on the Bosnian Serb lines a few hundred meters away. The books were meant to stop sniper bullets, a number of which had already made their way into various door frames and through a picture or two hanging on the walls.

Bosnian army offensives were still going on in the northwest, and artillery rounds were still sounding in the surrounding mountains, but Sarajevo itself was relatively quiet. The Bosnian Serbs had stopped shelling the city after a hit on a crowded marketplace in late August precipitated a strong NATO air campaign against them. Sniper fire also had dropped off dramatically. At one of the first UN press conferences I attended, the condition of a person previously reported as killed by a sniper near the Holiday Inn was upgraded to "slightly wounded." No doubt about it, things were looking up.

In fact, in the middle of October a cease-fire was arranged, and less than a month later the peace accords were signed in Dayton, Ohio. Eventually, at the apartment where I was staying, my landlady unashamedly put the encyclopedia and other books back on their shelves.

Šoba is the first in a series of comics under the general title "Stories from Bosnia," which will be about some of the people I met

in Sarajevo on both sides of the lines at an uncertain time when the war was essentially over, but when whatever was filling the void didn't seem much like peace.

I should point out that I spent my time in Bosnia in those areas where the fight was between the Bosnian government and the Bosnian Serbs. Therefore, I won't have much to say about the actions of the Bosnian Croats and their war against the Bosnian government.

PERSONAL NOTES

After completing Šoba I will be turning my full attention to a book-length project [sorry, I hate the term "graphic novel," which doesn't apply in any case since it supposes fiction] for Fantagraphics Books about the eastern Bosnian enclave Goražde, where I spent some weeks. I'll return to "Stories from Bosnia" as soon as I've finished the Goražde book.

Also, I would like to apologize to all the good people I met in Sarajevo for taking so long to produce anything of substance from my trip to Bosnia. I would also like to thank all those people who helped the work of a somewhat gazed cartoonist who showed up asking for their attention when they had other things to think about. I would especially like to acknowledge the aid and friendship of Srdan Vuletić and of the staff of the monthly magazine "Dani," in particular Imrana, Dino, and Zoran.

This comic book is dedicated to Šoba, of course, and to the Zaimović family, who reminded me in their quiet way that culture and dignity still exist in Europe, and who welcomed me into their warm home at a time of great personal loss.

Joe Sacco

ŠOBA IS PRONOUNCED
"SHOBA"

\$OBA!

AFTER THIS WAR STARTED, I REALIZED ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE



There was an atmosphere at the beginning of the war. Everyone wanted to fight. People were going to fight with knives... There were few guns, few pistols, few bullets. One time on the line I was given only three bullets...



WHEN SOLDIERS RETURNED FROM THE FRONT, EVERYONE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE

YOU JUST TOOK YOUR CIGARETTE AND SAID, 'YES, I KILLED THREE OF THEM.'



I survived the greatest battle of the war on a hill called Zuc near the town part of town. From that hill you can control everything...

"I remember it was four in the morning. I was drinking coffee when the shelling started."



"It was really like hell, 'the longest day of my life.' I was hanging on to the roots of trees because people were flying in the air. I was deaf for 10 days after. People were buried in their trenches. Three hundred people were killed in two days..."

"It was a cycle"

First the shelling, then their soldiers coming

We'd get out of our holes and hold them off



Then the shelling again...



"I knew something about first-aid. The first guy I saw had lost his foot."



"Someone else had his scalp peeled back. His brain was showing."



"I replaced the scalp and bandaged him"



YOU SEE A BIG PILE OF HUMAN MEAT. NO ARMS. NO LEGS.

"I lasted only the first day. I was replaced. I went crazy."



Body Count?
Motörhead?
Helmet?!

Loud though!

Search me!
sing through our heads!

Meanwhile...

Let's talk about girls!
They're doing their girl thing!

Hanging off the ends of burning cigarettes!
Making one coffee last last last!

Aleksandra the waitress: she's on stand by!

No one's buying tonight!
No one's got money!
Who cares and what now?!

Against the Machine?
Suicidal Tendencies?

Soba should know!

He's parked by the speaker.

THIS IS MY SEAT FOR ME
RESERVED SEAT IN
THE BEST BAR IN
THE CITY
YOU CAN CONTROL
EVERYTHING
FROM HERE

Causing epileptic attacks left and right!

or is that air?

and over there...

Man-T and Celo,

they're head-banging as usual!!

Watch out!

they're out to concuss themselves!







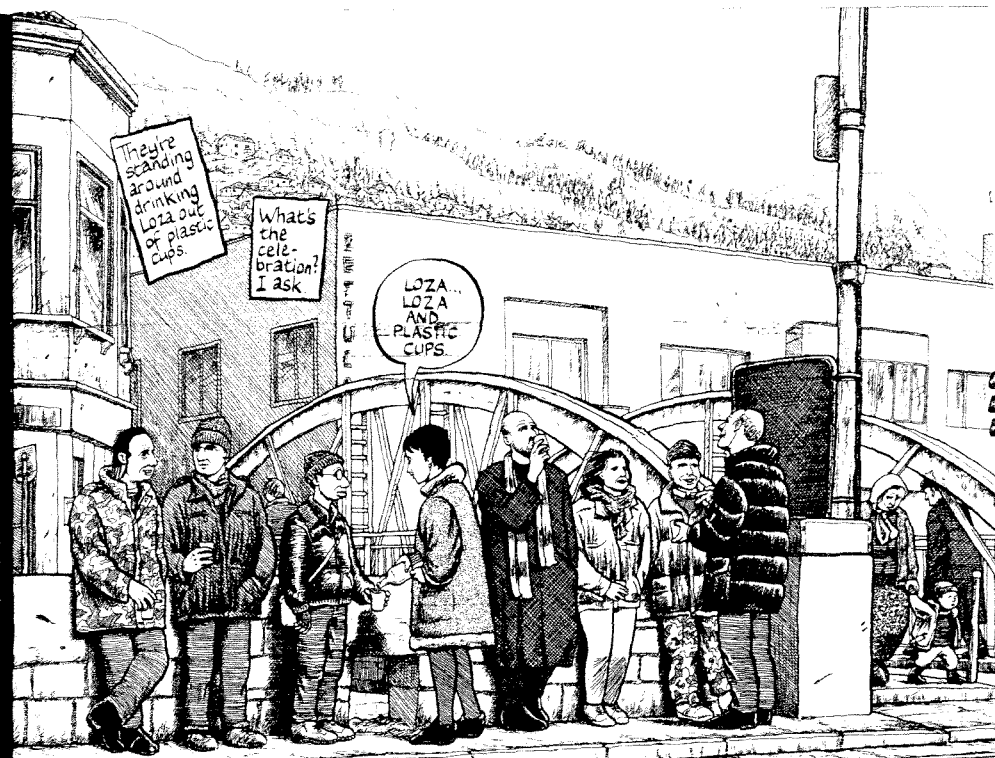
A LOT OF PEOPLE WILL GO CRAZY AFTER THIS WAR. THE HOSPITALS WILL BE FULL OF CRAZY PEOPLE... ESPECIALLY THE FIGHTERS FROM THE SPECIAL UNITS.



THE WAR IS EVERYTHING THEY HAVE. THEY LIKE TO FIGHT. THEY LIKE DANGER.



SOME-TIMES I THINK I WAS BORN IN THIS WAR, THAT ALL MY LIFE IS WAR.



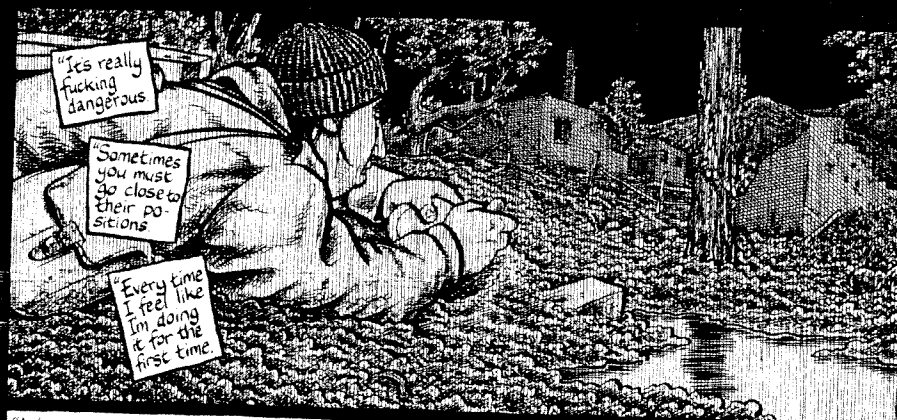
Vlado and Soba are discussing the porn flick they want to make some day starring Soba, of course...



Soba posits the opening scene of his porno flick. He and Vlado are lying on a bed, see, talking philosophy, Hegel, then the camera pans down and—







"It's really fucking dangerous"

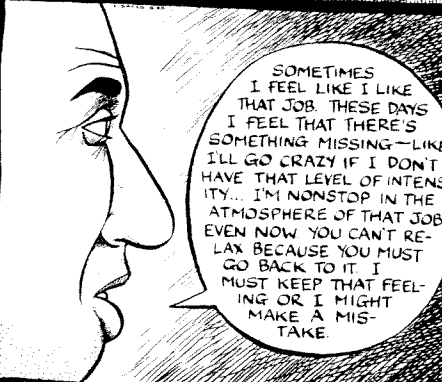
Sometimes you must go close to their positions

Every time I feel like I'm doing it for the first time

"We are working at night... We have only a stick to find their mines..."



"When we find them, we take out the explosive and replace them... They have mines that explode a mine below when you pull them out. You have to check everything."



SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE I LIKE THAT JOB. THESE DAYS I FEEL THAT THERE'S SOMETHING MISSING—LIKE I'LL GO CRAZY IF I DON'T HAVE THAT LEVEL OF INTENSITY... I'M NONSTOP IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF THAT JOB. EVEN NOW YOU CAN'T RELAX BECAUSE YOU MUST GO BACK TO IT. I MUST KEEP THAT FEELING OR I MIGHT MAKE A MISTAKE



I CAN'T RELAX ANYWAY. WHEN YOU RELAX YOU START THINKING. AND THEN YOU'RE THINKING, WHAT AM I DOING? THIS IS CRAZY.



A is back! recently returned from Bihać or Doboj or Sanski Most from places with names one learns overnight when armies crash through armies and a whole war pivots, turns and swings the other way

I LOVE LIFE

THIS MOMENT

THIS SONG

THIS SCHNAPPS

And the front line?

It breathes he says It inhales and exhales, bringing him to the 'Chetniks, bringing the Chetniks to him...

Sobas over there, chatting up the young ladies

the ladies are young at Club Obala

they're the crop of girls too young to have been sent out of Sarajevo in '91 when the war began...

they're 19, 20 now, the glorious pinnacle



And Soba is Soba! needing no introduction!

He is the Planter of Land Mines!
The Sculptor!
The Painter!
The Rock Star!

The Disciple of Corto Maltese—cap and all—

who used to stride into places with pistol at the ready under his longcoat.



A is on the local front line tomorrow. Sarajevo's the one that doesn't breathe that hasn't moved in years has one day on, one day off. nonstop, he says, and he doesn't mind...

Anyway, the cease-fire is holding, he thinks the war is over...

I AM ALIVE

I AM HERE

His best friends are dead, both brothers killed in action, his mother and other family massacred, and you don't know the half of it... he himself is what people here call a Great Fighter... he is special units, wounded in four places.



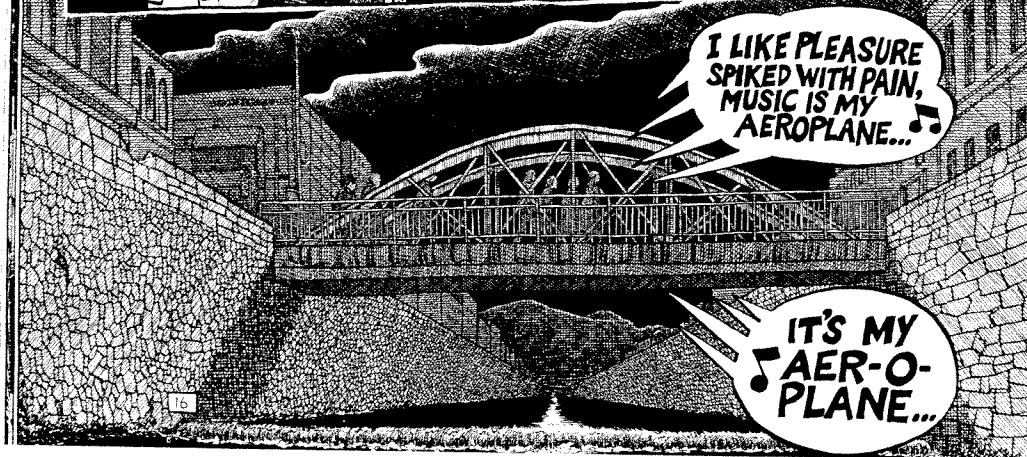
One day he showed me the bullet marks in his armored jacket.

I AM THE BEST

I DON'T KNOW WHAT FEAR IS



JOE!



I LIKE PLEASURE SPIKED WITH PAIN, MUSIC IS MY AEROPLANE...

IT'S MY AER-O-PLANE...



WE CAN FUCK ANY GIRL WE WANT!

A ROW OF WHITE ASSES!

YOU WILL SEE!

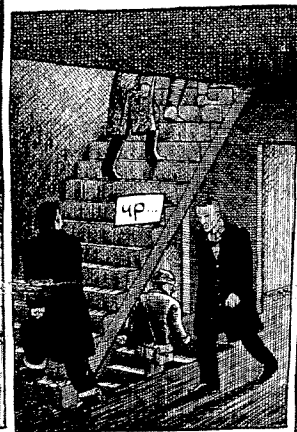
I'VE DONE IT FOUR TIMES!

?



I LOVE THIS CITY!

I DEFEND THIS CITY!



There she is, up against a wall and getting all chatty with some pascard who hasn't even raised a sweat...

Never mind, Soba pulls another pretty into his orbit...

I want you to be my lover be my lover

She wants to dance all right...

Soba reprises a condensed version of his best moves for quick results.

but she's too caught up in her own pirouettes to notice his...

and at 180 beats per minute, Soba's Greatest Dance Moves are expended fast...

and then!

Yiuiha!

Soba's found a second wind!

and not just a wind!

He's pulled a tornado outta his hae!

And she-?

SHE ALWAYS GETS LIKE THIS WHEN SHE'S DRUNK AT PARTIES

But what time is it? Jesus, it's way past Police Hour, and I realize these kids are gonna be here all night. On the streets they can get stopped and arrested... they're in this party for the duration, till four, five, whenever the curfew ends...

Soba's got a handful now, this little twister could be blowing all night!

I've got UN credentials, a Blue Card, if the police stop me, I'll flash 'em that...



But it's not the police I'm worried about.



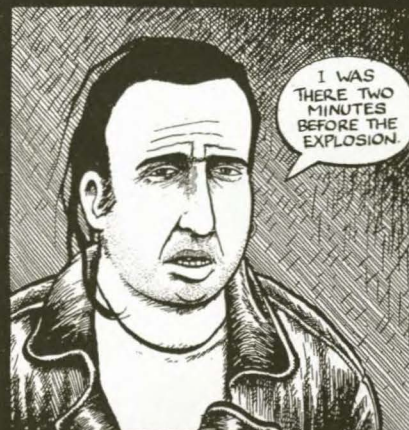
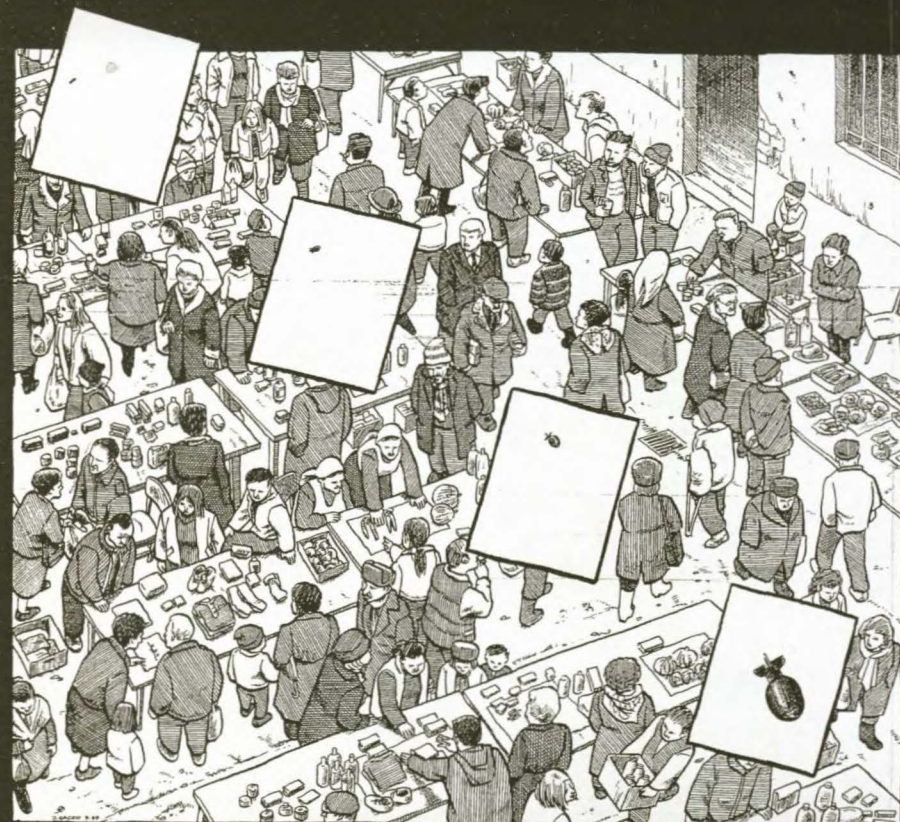
It's the rustling in the garbage, it's the growling.



It's the soft trotting behind you that stops every time you stop.



It's the dogs.



I WAS THERE TWO MINUTES BEFORE THE EXPLOSION.



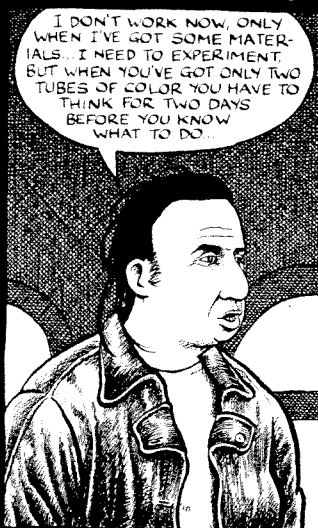
"I heard a boom, screams."

DON'T GO THERE! DON'T GO THERE!



EVERY-
THING
WAS
BLOODY

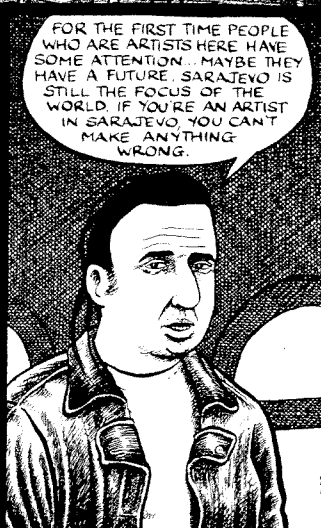
LIKE
THIS
PIC-
TURE



I DON'T WORK NOW, ONLY
WHEN I'VE GOT SOME MATER-
IALS. I NEED TO EXPERIMENT.
BUT WHEN YOU'VE GOT ONLY TWO
TUBES OF COLOR YOU HAVE TO
THINK FOR TWO DAYS
BEFORE YOU KNOW
WHAT TO DO.



BEFORE THE WAR
THERE WAS NO
FUTURE HERE AS AN
ARTIST. NOBODY
WANTED YOUR WORK
NO ONE CAME FROM
THE WEST TO
SEE IT.



FOR THE FIRST TIME PEOPLE
WHO ARE ARTISTS HERE HAVE
SOME ATTENTION. MAYBE THEY
HAVE A FUTURE. SARAJEVO IS
STILL THE FOCUS OF THE
WORLD. IF YOU'RE AN ARTIST
IN SARAJEVO YOU CAN'T
MAKE ANYTHING
WRONG.



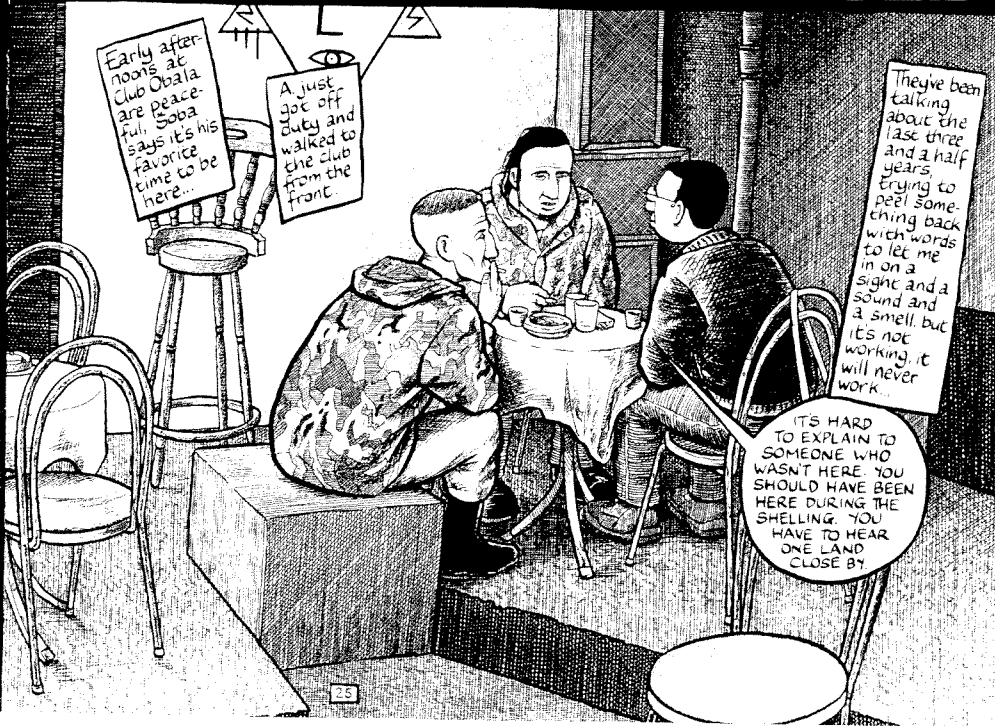
ARTISTS IN SARAJEVO. A LOT OF
THEM ARE HUNGRY FOR SUCCESS.
MOST OF THEM WERE NEVER ON THE
FRONT LINE. THEY'VE GOT GOOD
WORKS, BUT THEY'RE NOT EXTREME
ENOUGH... NOT THAT I THINK YOU
NEED TO PAINT MASSACRES
AND BODIES... OR PEOPLE
BURNED UP.



BEFORE THE WAR, I
NEVER PLANNED ANYTHING
BIG. I ONLY WANTED
TO BE A SUCCESS
IN THIS TOWN.



NOW MY
VISION IS
SOMETHING
ELSE.

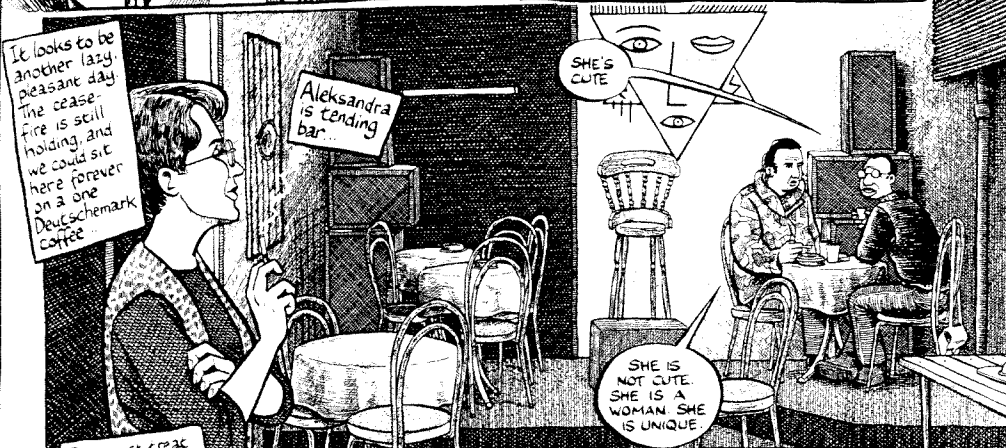
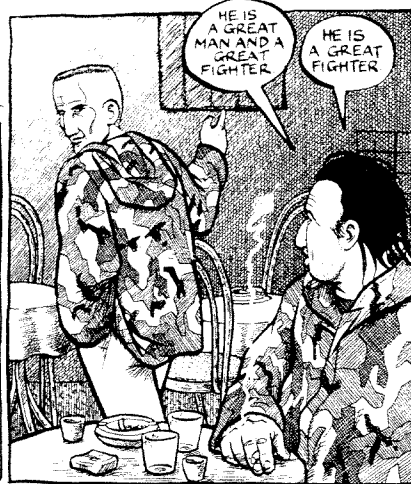


Early after-
noons at
Club Obala
are peace-
ful. Soba
says it's his
favorite
time to be
here...

A just
got off
duty and
walked to
the club
from the
front.

They've been
talking
about the
last three
and a half
years,
trying to
peel some-
thing back
with words
to let me
in on a
sight and a
sound and
a smell, but
it's not
working, it
will never
work...

IT'S HARD
TO EXPLAIN TO
SOMEONE WHO
WASN'T HERE. YOU
SHOULD HAVE BEEN
HERE DURING THE
SHELLING. YOU
HAVE TO HEAR
ONE LAND
CLOSE BY.



One must treat Sarajevo women with respect. He calls me they have a great sense of dignity, of self-respect. Before the intermittent restoration of running water — for years, in other words, till a couple of weeks ago — they had to wash themselves with as little as three liters of water a day and still they managed...



Soba says he is a little afraid to leave Sarajevo himself.

Here he is the Planter of Land Mines the Rock Star, the man who strides into Club Obala in his longcoat, Corto Maltese style...

and her?

SHE LEFT AND SHE IS A NO-BODY.

JUST ANOTHER REFUGEE FROM BOSNIA

It's cold and getting dark but on the way home Soba insists on stopping to buy us each an ice cream.

IT'S NOT GOOD BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER

"It's the little signs that speak a lot... grass... the pebbles moved."

"We have to check our mines constantly. We have to see if they still have fuses."

"If the Chetniks have found our mines, they'll take out the fuses just before an attack. They clear the area."

"The enemy has new mines now. Russian ones, they're big and black. There's only one guy in town who knows how to disarm those mines. He'll teach the rest of us."

"Recently we were clearing an old minefield. The best guy in my unit stood up and tripped a mine, but he only lost the heel of his boot."

THEN TWO DAYS AGO ONE OF MY FRIENDS LOST HIS LEG ON A MINE

I run into Soba at the Billiard Club... tomorrow night has got him jittery

WE HAVE TO PLANT SOME MINES IN VOGOŠĆA

IT'S NORTH OF THE CITY.

WE CONTROL ONE BUILDING THERE, A UNIVERSITY BUILDING.



"Before the war I never liked the uniform. It's not a big deal, but there's a feeling when you dress in your uniform. You prepare yourself to be—

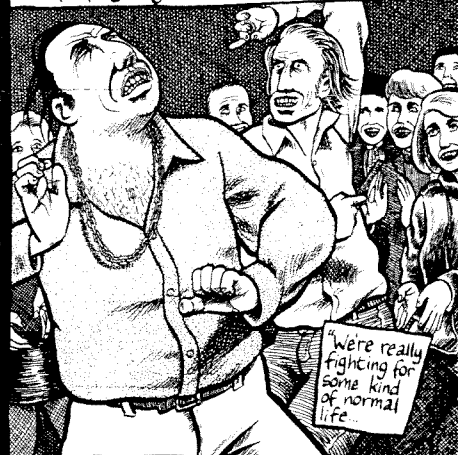


"When you dress in your uniform you must understand one thing: Maybe one day you're going to lose your life. It's really reality."

"During the big shelling in the country, the big fights around the city, the only question is how long you can survive. But in that situation you're talking about the next party or where to meet your friends, the ones who are still here."



"The attitude is a very important thing. I know a lot of people who depend on maybe five or six of my friends. Everybody is watching you, so if you create the wrong mood everybody feels it and they are sad. But if you are in the mood, if you're dancing, everybody sees that there's somebody making an atmosphere, and people join you."



"Everybody wants this war to stop. On the Serb side, too, no one wants to fight."



MY FAMILY WAS A COMMUNIST FAMILY. MY FATHER IS A MUSLIM, MY MOTHER A SERB. THEY EDUCATED ME. I STILL CAN'T HATE. I WAS EDUCATED IN TITO'S POLITICS, BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY. PEOPLE MUST LOVE EACH OTHER.

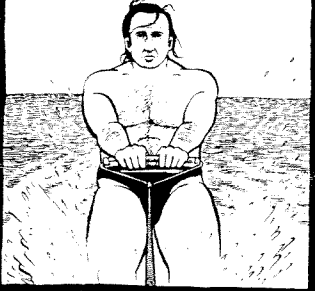


"It's sad when you realize we'll never be together again. I used to travel everywhere in Yugoslavia. I traveled to Zagreb to Belgrade... I used to go every year to the coast."

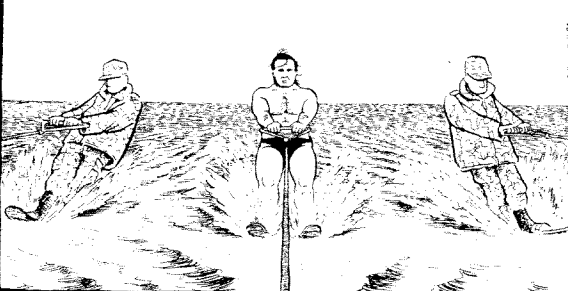


"The people were so mixed. I think we've all lost this war. Maybe Croatia profited from this war."

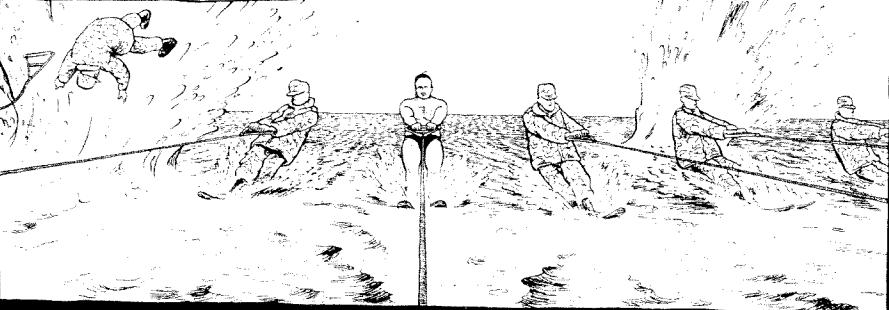
"Now I dream every night of skiing, at the sea..."



...but with soldiers...



and there are always explosions...



One after another my pals are demobilized.

They're happy about it, of course.

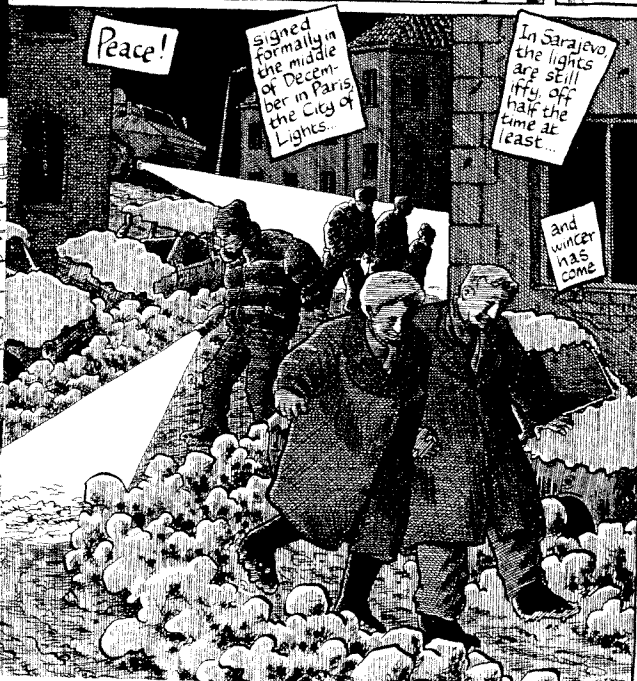
a little bewildered too...

They're contemplating other things, like without the army's pack-rabbit.

Finally it's Soba's turn.

as of five this morning, he was a civilian again.

THIS LAST TIME I ALMOST GOT KILLED ON THE MOUNTAIN. I TRIPPED A WIRE, BUT THE FUSE WAS DEFECTIVE.



Peace!

signed formally in the middle of December in Paris, the City of Lights.

In Sarajevo, the lights are still off, off half the time at least...

and winner has come



In his apartment, the Great Fighter tells me —

THIS WAR WILL STOP FOR ME WHEN I WANT IT TO STOP



In early November 1995 a peace is agreed to in Ohio.

Peace!

Thirty-one family members, relatives, mas-
sacred. His mother. And he knows who
— a cousin survived, witnessed the whole
thing — he knows. And where they live

MY WAR.
IT CAN'T BE
FINISHED THE
DAY AFTER
TOMORROW



Peace
and
rumors
of peace!



Michael
Jackson's
coming!
Janet
Jackson!
Rod
Stewart!
Nona, Paul
McCartney
and Eric
Clapton!
They're in
Italy
waiting
for a plane!
George
Michael!
Sing! Every-
one is coming!
There's going
to be a knock-
out end-of-the-
war concert in
Sarajevo!!

They're
total
pros!

They
oung a
path to
the exit!

They manage
to extricate
Bono without
having to
machine-gun
anyone!



Peace!



Bono, the
U2 fellow,
he's the
only one to
actually
show.

Not to
play
music,
not yet

He walks
into Club
Obala one
night to
chat with
the kids.

34



He's found
himself a
soul mate

Soba!

They talk
shop,
rockers for
a few
minutes.

Mean-
while—
Bono's
Bosnian
handlers—
they're set
to pop a
nue!

they've
got other
dates for
Bono-bon the

dignitaries
and dinners!

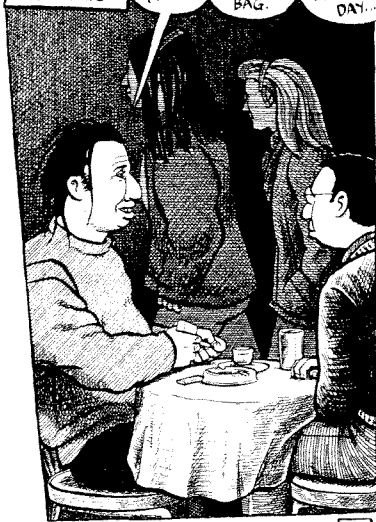
they gotta
terminate
this side
show pronto!

A couple of
weeks later,
Sobas telling
me about a
sudden cre-
ative burst.

I'M
USING
HOUSE
PAINTS.

I'M
PAINTING
ON A
SLEEPING
BAG.

I CAN'T
BELIEVE
WHAT I
DID YESTER-
DAY!



BUT THE
SORT OF THING
I'M DOING NOW,
WHO WILL WANT
TO BUY IT? IT'S
ABOUT HORRIBLE
THINGS



HOW
WILL I
MAKE MONEY
IN THE
FUTURE?



MAYBE
I SHOULD GO
FIGHT FOR MONEY
LIKE THE 'DOGS OF
WAR'. I COULD KILL
FOR MONEY. I'VE
BEEN FOUR YEARS
IN WAR. I KNOW
ALL ABOUT LAND
MINES. I'M A
FUCKING EXP-
ERT.





